Influences of Pre-Christian Mythology and Christianity on Old Norse Poetry

A Narrative Study of *Vafþrúðnismál*

Andrew McGillivray

MEDIEVAL INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS

THE NORTHERN MEDIEVAL WORLD: ON THE MARGINS OF EUROPE

Influences of Pre-Christian Mythology and Christianity on Old Norse Poetry

NORTHERN MEDIEVAL WORLD

EDITORIAL BOARD

Carolyne Larrington (Chair)
St. John's College, Oxford

Oren Falk
Cornell University

Dawn Hadley
University of Sheffield

Jana Schulman
Western Michigan University

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson
Universitetet i Oslo

Medieval Institute Publications is a program of
The Medieval Institute, College of Arts and Sciences

Western Michigan University

Influences of Pre-Christian Mythology and Christianity on Old Norse Poetry

A Narrative Study of *Vafþrúðnismál*

Andrew McGillivray

Northern Medieval World

MEDIEVAL INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo

Copyright © 2018 by the Board of Trustees of Western Michigan University

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data are available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 9781580443357
eISBN: 9781580443364

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

Contents

Abbreviations vii

Acknowledgments ix

1. Vafþrúðnir Who? 1

2. Critical Contexts 25

3. At Home in Ásgarðr 53

4. The Guest Waits on the Floor 85

5. Sitting on the Giant's Bench 111

6. The Odinic Attack 147

7. Looking to *Alvíssmál* 171

8. Closing Time 187

Bibliography 197

Index 213

"This page intentionally left blank"

Abbreviations

Eddic poems

Akv = *Atlakviða*
Alv = *Alvíssmál*
Am = *Atlamál*
Bdr = *Baldrs draumar*
Fjöl = *Fjölsvinnsmál*
Fm = *Fáfnismál*
Gg = *Grógaldr*
Grm = *Grímnismál*
Grp = *Grípisspá*
Grt = *Grottasöngr*
Háv = *Hávamál*
Hdl = *Hyndluljóð*
Hgát = *Heiðreks gátur*
HHv = *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*
Hrbl = *Hárbarðsljóð*
Hym = *Hymiskviða*
Lok = *Lokasenna*
Rþ = *Rígsþula*
Sg = *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*
Skm = *Skírnismál*
Vkv = *Völundarkviða*
Vm = *Vafþrúðnismál*
Vsp = *Völuspá*
Þrk = *Þrymskviða*

Manuscripts

R	=	Codex Regius of eddic poetry – GKS 2365 4°
A	=	AM 748 I a 4°
H	=	Hauksbók – AM 544 4°
U	=	Codex Upsaliensis – DG 11 4°
R^2	=	Codex Regius of Snorra Edda – GKS 2367 4°
W	=	Codex Wormianus – AM 242 fol.
T	=	Codex Trajectinus – Traj 1374

Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK BEGAN AS a doctoral thesis at the University of Iceland in the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies (Íslensku- og menningardeild). I composed the thesis during 2012–14, and I am grateful for the funding which made this possible, provided by the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís) from their Icelandic Research fund. In its thesis form, the work constitutes a contribution to the research project *Encounters with the Paranormal in Medieval Iceland*. It was exciting and thought-provoking to be a member of this project, and I am grateful for the guidance of the project's principal investigator, Ármann Jakobsson, and the stimulating and insightful environment cultivated among the project's co-investigators.

The thesis has now grown into the present book with generous support from the University of Winnipeg's research fund, and I carried out additional research for the book during 2015–17 under the guidance of Jaqueline McLeod Rogers, Chair of the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications. Librarians in both Iceland and Manitoba have helped me greatly during the research process, and I would like to particularly acknowledge staff in the Inter-Library Loan Department at the University of Winnipeg, the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba's Elizabeth Dafoe Library, and the National Department (Íslandssafn) at the National and University Library of Iceland (Landsbókasafn).

Many individuals deserve special thanks. My mentors, Jaqueline McLeod Rogers, Ármann Jakobsson, and Birna Bjarnadóttir, all continue to play an essential role in my development as a writer and a teacher. I am grateful to Tracy Whalen for encouraging me during the later stages of writing this book, and I am likewise thankful to Jason Hannan, Robert Byrnes, and Janice Freeman, all of whom placed trust in me at an important time. Annette Lassen and Gunnar Harðarson were exceptional guides for me during the writing of the thesis, and they, along with Gísli Sigurðsson

and Tim Machan, thoughtfully read earlier drafts of this book in its thesis form as members of my internal and external PhD examining committees, respectively. These scholars all continue to inspire my academic work.

My long-time colleague and close friend Christopher Crocker has generously supported me with many aspects related to this book, including reading a full draft of the thesis and sharing many conversations about the publishing process. Jade Chapman provided great assistance in preparing the present manuscript for publication. She not only read the first two chapters of the book, but also helped me organize much of my current research planned for future publication. For the gracious support shown to me during the composition of this book, I offer my warm thanks to the following people: Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir, Sean Lawing, Miriam Mayburd, Gunnvör Karlsdóttir, Védís Ragnheiðardóttir, Yoav Tirosh, Arngrímur Vídalín, Helen Lepp Friesen, Matthew Flisfeder, Sheila Page, Karin Collins, Nadine LeGier, Ryan Johnson, Dustin Geeraert, and Gordon Beveridge. Furthermore, I extend gratitude to Shannon Cunningham, Acquisitions Editor for Medieval Institute Publications, for encouraging me to publish this work with the Northern Medieval World series, to the series editors, and to Sally Evans-Darby for her excellent copy-editing of the final manuscript.

I am eternally grateful to Angela and Oliver McGillivray for believing in me and my work. I am solely responsible for errors that remain.

Chapter One

Vafþrúðnir Who?

VAFÞRÚÐNIR IS A GIANT, or more precisely a *jötunn* (plural: *jötnar*). He is a mythological character who is an opponent of Óðinn, an Old Norse god or *áss* (plural: *æsir*), in the poem called, in English, "Vafþrúðnir's Sayings." This book is an analysis which focuses on the poem's pre-Christian and Christian influences, especially looking at layers of time or temporality in the poem itself and in context with comparative literary sources from the medieval period. The comparative sources are most often mythological texts and other eddic poems.

The oldest version of the poem *Vafþrúðnismál* (*Vm*) survives in a vellum manuscript from ca. 1270, but the poem has older roots in the oral culture of medieval Iceland. The poem has a long and rich transmission history, extending both back in time to the pre-literate age before its appearance in vellum and forward to its representation in modern editions and translations of eddic poetry in the twenty-first century. Besides its place in the Codex Regius manuscript of eddic poetry (GKS 2365 4°; R) and the fragmentary version found in AM 748 I a 4° (A), the poem was also incorporated into manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* during the medieval period and is furthermore found in many paper manuscripts composed in late medieval and post-Reformation Iceland. *Snorra Edda* is an important work that draws from eddic poetry, and largely from *Vm*, for its content and for that matter many quotations from eddic poems are found in it. It comprises four sections, the Prologue, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and, at the end, the *Háttatal*, and it is attributed to Snorri Sturluson in the version found in the Codex Upsaliensis (DG 11 4°; U), a manuscript from ca. 1300.[1] The two other principal vellum manuscripts containing *Snorra Edda* are the Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.; W) and the Codex Regius manuscript of *Snorra Edda* (GKS 2367 4°; R^2).[2] In order to

interpret skaldic poetry, a thorough background in mythological knowledge was required, and as such *Snorra Edda* is a comprehensive work of Old Norse mythography.[3] Along with eddic poems, *Snorra Edda* is an important work to consider when conducting an analysis of influences of pre-Christian mythology and Christianity on Old Norse poetry.

A study of *Vm* is thus interesting not only for an interpretation of the poem's narrative frame and its contents, although that is the primary focus of this book, but also for keen observation on how the text has been treated by successive generations of receivers and interpreters during seven full centuries, beginning with manuscript composition and transmission in medieval Iceland, and then, after the emergence of print, the creation of print editions of eddic poetry in Scandinavia and on mainland Europe.[4] As can be expected, there has been a great deal of reception and criticism of eddic poetry generally since the emergence of print editions, and *Vm* specifically. This study intends to place the poem in a narrative context that focuses on the poem and the mythological texts to which it is most closely related.

Introduction

Vm is always found among other narratives, alongside whole poems or as sayings or individual quotations within larger narratives. The placement of fragments of the poem within the text of *Gylfaginning* illustrates how the works of Old Norse mythology have been configured together into a narrative cycle from a very early stage, for in *Gylfaginning* there are a number of poetic fragments from individual eddic poems brought together for the purpose of presenting a seemingly coherent pre-Christian belief system, although the presentation of the text is not pre-Christian at all, nor is its ethos. This can be seen by looking at how *Gylfaginning* is framed within *Snorra Edda*, coming after the overtly Christian Prologue. Our modern understanding of Old Norse mythology relies on a very small number of texts, which, although providing a great deal of information, do not completely or accurately represent what the people may have believed in the pre-Christian era in Iceland and other parts of the Nordic area. The eddic poems are representations and reinterpretations of what may have been rehearsed, performed, and possibly believed by pagan people as the poems were transmitted orally. There are, however, reflections of some of these myths that can be found in Viking-Age sculpture such as rune stones where the myths are often depicted in their pre-Christian forms.[5] The

major focus here is on the potential factors that motivated the recording of these narratives into manuscripts in the thirteenth century in Iceland.

The literary study of a poem such as *Vm* can give rise to meaning on three levels: the literary level, wherein a formal literary interpretation explores the poem's meaning; the historical level, wherein the poem's contents and its meaning, which we learn from the first level, tell us something about the society or culture that preserved and transmitted the work; and the critical level, in the form of the ongoing debate about the meaning of the poem on both its literary and historical levels. The primary focus at present is on the literary level, as it is principally through the study of *Vm* and other medieval Icelandic sources that interpretations are made. The secondary aim is toward the historical level, in that through a comparative and contextual reading, some understanding of why *Vm* was composed and what the cosmic story recounted in the poem means in comparison to accounts in related source materials is explored. And finally, on the critical level, it is the aim of the work to incorporate significant critiques of *Vm* into the debate, and in the end to comment on important contributions by each to a study of the poem and how the present work adds to the critical chorus. As is developed below, this book analyzes the poem using a certain theoretical lens and argues for the applicability of the lens for the analysis of other eddic poems.

The study of literature is largely a subjective practice dependent on individual critiques that most often fit into larger interpretive frameworks or trends. With scrutiny, each reader of a text can achieve a measure of critical insight if they are both careful and thoughtful with interpretations, even if the interpretive method is incomplete.[6] The freshness that is sought after results from the new perspective that a contemporary thinker can bring to a work. In order to accomplish this task, a number of terms require definition, and two such terms—*myth* and *narrative*—are primary to the present work and are addressed at the outset.

On the one hand, a myth is a story that is thought to have originally been religious in nature. The mythic story, moreover, is or was told by a cultural group for the purpose of explaining a natural or cosmic phenomenon, or to inculcate a social norm. Individual myths are often part of interconnected collections of similar stories, and these stories together are known as a culture's mythology.[7] Based on this definition *Vm* is considered a representation of a myth, for as a thirteenth-century text it may represent an archaic myth. The information that is revealed in the poem is thought to have religious origins in the pre-Christian belief system or

systems of the Norse-language area, although the value of the poem as a window into past religious practice or belief is problematic. There are numerous explanations for natural and cosmic phenomena in the poem that are highly metaphoric in their quality, and the poem was indeed told by a cultural group, as can be demonstrated by its survival in a medieval Icelandic manuscript from the thirteenth century. *Vm*, finally, is one of a number of mythological eddic poems that have survived in what is known in English as *The Poetic Edda*, which, together with *Snorra Edda*, are the two most important sources for Old Norse mythology, although the exact contents of *The Poetic Edda* vary between editions, unless only considering the poems from R. As a representation of a myth the poem is thus also a part of a represented mythological system, or mythology. John Lindow argues that "a mythology is not just a corpus of narratives, but a system of related narratives with implicit cross-referencing. This system is therefore intertextual: all or most of it is latent in each part of it."[8] Some modern interpreters consider mythology to mean a collection of religious stories whose truth, while still believed in, is symbolic rather than literal.

A narrative, on the other hand, is a story, the telling of a story, or an account of a situation or an event.[9] Therefore, *Vm* is also a narrative, in that it is a story of Óðinn going to visit Vafþrúðnir; it is also the telling of a story in eddic verse and an account of a situation or event, in this case Óðinn's travels. The poem is thus both a representation of a myth and a narrative: a mythological narrative.[10] *Vm* is by default a narrative, and as a narrative it is of the mythic variety.

Vm is not a suspenseful narrative. For the audience, there is little question of whether Óðinn will be the victor, as Óðinn is always the victor in wisdom contests. *Heiðreks gátur* (*Hgát*) and *Hárbarðsljóð* (*Hrbl*) come to mind, for example, as poems where Óðinn is victorious in wisdom contests over King Heiðrekr and Þórr, respectively. In their dialogue in *Vm*, Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir provide an extensive cosmological history and geography of the cosmos, beginning with its origins, leading to its downfall, and ending with its regeneration. At the forefront of the wisdom contest is the underlying theme of the division and struggle between the *æsir* and the *jötnar* that is in this instance played out head-to-head in the contest. Vafþrúðnir's death takes place after the poem is finished, and although it does not occur within the action of the narrative the reader can assume that it does indeed take place, or else the grave tone of Vafþrúðnir's defeat would not resound as deeply as it does. The excitement that does permeate the poem is in the irony of Vafþrúðnir's defeat, as he thought himself to be

in control of the contest right up until its conclusion, but then experiences a reversal of fortunes. The structure of the poem mirrors the cosmological cycle of Old Norse mythology as it is represented in the eddic poems and *Snorra Edda*. In this sense the poem is microcosmic: within the narrative frame the cosmos is represented in miniature. Through much of the history of the mythological cosmos, as the preserved narratives present it, the *æsir* and the *jötnar* are antagonists, but at Ragnarök the *jötnar* are wiped out completely and the *æsir* mostly eradicated, but not completely, and the divine line continues into the next generation. Vafþrúðnir succumbs and dies because of his guest's final advances while Óðinn lives to see another day.

Vm is the third poem in the R manuscript and the title of the poem is itself preserved in the manuscript.[11] The manuscript is made up of forty-five leaves (or folios) in six gatherings (or quires). The first five gatherings have eight leaves each, and the final gathering has five leaves. One whole gathering (i.e., eight leaves) has been lost from the middle of the volume, resulting in a gap between leaves thirty-two and thirty-three, where the missing gathering would have been.[12] The manuscript contains twenty-nine poems in total in its present form, but may have contained an additional one or two poems before the missing gathering was lost.[13] There are a number of hypotheses about the production and preservation of R, and a number of scholars believe it was produced at the Þingeyrar monastery in northwestern Iceland.[14]

R is the largest medieval collection of eddic poetry that survives and the position of *Vm* as the third poem in the manuscript is significant. The texts that precede it are *Völuspá* (*Vsp*) and *Hávamál* (*Háv*) and the text that follows it is *Grímnismál* (*Grm*). Together these four poems, along with *Hrbl*, the sixth poem in the codex, comprise a group of poems that center around Óðinn and convey his association with wisdom. It is in *Vm* that Óðinn arguably faces his greatest challenge in regards to knowledge, for he must face off with a powerful giant in a wisdom contest, even though his victory is perhaps a sure thing and Óðinn actually initiates the contest. In *Vsp* Óðinn receives knowledge from a seeress, in both *Háv* and *Grm* he expounds his knowledge, although in different manners, and in *Hrbl* Óðinn engages in a contest of insults or flyting with Þórr, and both contestants must draw on their wit. *Vm* uniquely places Óðinn in a contest of wits with a *jötunn*.

The first dialogic poem in R is *Vm*. The main part of the poem has Óðinn test the knowledge of Vafþrúðnir, and indeed his own, but it

begins with a four-stanza dialogue between Óðinn and his wife Frigg. In that short scene Óðinn states that he intends to go and visit Vafþrúðnir and Frigg replies that she would rather have him stay at home in Ásgarðr. Óðinn, however, full of confidence and curiosity, must make the journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall. The discussion is settled with Óðinn embarking on his journey and Frigg wishing him good luck while he is gone. In the fifth stanza of the poem the narrator explicitly reveals themself to the audience; otherwise silent, they state that Óðinn travels to the hall of Vafþrúðnir, arrives there and enters. Stanzas 6 through 10 comprise the god and the giant greeting one another, during which Óðinn introduces himself as Gagnráðr, and Vafþrúðnir sets the stakes of the contest. It is significant that Óðinn appears at the giant's hall in disguise, as he does in many other appearances he makes in the corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic mythological and legendary sources. His ability to disguise is crucial to his ability to even participate in these contests, without which his challenge would not be accepted as his true identity would be known. Óðinn's ability to trick others is instrumental to his successes and plays no small part in his victory over Vafþrúðnir, and his assumed name's meaning—possibly "giver of advice"—is important for the poem's dramatic irony, for to take down his opponent he riddles but does not lie.

The next sequence of narrative is the opening of the wisdom contest between the two main characters in the poem, Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, and Vafþrúðnir's stipulation that the loser of the wisdom contest will die. This is where Vafþrúðnir tests his visitor to determine if Gagnráðr is sufficiently wise to in turn be the one asking the questions. The four questions that the giant asks the god all revolve around the configuration of the cosmos, including the origins of the day and the night, the river that runs between the land of the gods and the land of the giants, and the field where the gods and Surtr will battle at Ragnarök. Óðinn answers the questions successfully, and the roles are then reversed: Gagnráðr, Óðinn in disguise, questions Vafþrúðnir, and this section of the poem comprises the wisdom contest proper. Óðinn's questions are similar to those posed by Vafþrúðnir, for the most part concerning the cosmos and its origins, including the origins of earth and sky, moon and sun, day and night, winter and summer, gods and giants; Óðinn also asks about Vafþrúðnir's earliest memory, the origins of the wind, Njörðr's origins among the *vanir*, and the *einherjar* in Valhöll; finally, the god asks of the origins of Vafþrúðnir's wisdom. These questions, which are concerned with the mythological past and to some extent the mythological present, comprise the contents of the

knowledge Óðinn first tests Vafþrúðnir on. It is in the final round of questioning that the contents of the contest move toward the future, although the future is indeed alluded to with the question concerning the *einherjar*, who all train in Valhöll in preparation for the future, and also in the question about Njörðr, who is said to return to the *vanir* in the future.

Óðinn begins the final round of questions by asking about the humans who will survive Ragnarök; then he asks about the fate of the sun and who will succeed her; next he asks about three maidens who will appear when the world is reborn; and then about which of the gods will survive Ragnarök. With his penultimate question, Óðinn asks about his own fate. Once the giant replies that Óðinn will succumb to Fenrir and die at Ragnarök, the god sets up the final, decisive question. Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir what it is that Óðinn said into the ear of his dead son at his funeral. Vafþrúðnir says that no man knows the answer to this thing that happened in the past, thus signaling to the audience that the wisdom contest is taking place after Baldr's death in the mythological timeline when the sources are configured into a coherent mythology, even if only artificially so. The *jötunn* admits that he is doomed, acknowledging that he is aware he has been contending with Óðinn in a wisdom contest, because only Óðinn could ask this question, which implies that the questioner can only ask questions to which he knows the answers. The *jötunn* even says that Óðinn is the wisest of beings, and with this the contest ends. Óðinn has unmasked himself and is victorious whereas Vafþrúðnir will lose his life. For the *jötunn* it is the end of the line and his death follows the end of the poem, presumably occurring "offstage."

Vm is only one poem of twenty-nine surviving in R, a manuscript that contains both mythological and heroic poems, and some conclusions must be drawn about the place of the poem in its mythological context in the manuscript. That the compiler of the manuscript brought together mythological and heroic eddic poems, placing them in two distinct categories in the manuscript, urges further consideration of context. The present approach argues that *Vm* can most logically be read in context with the other mythological poems, especially poems relating to knowledge, and to some degree in relation to the compilation as a whole, including the heroic poems. At the end of the present book the eddic poem *Alvíssmál* (*Alv*) will be looked at closely.

From these impressions of past beliefs, it may be possible to learn about the society for which these narratives were significant enough to preserve, that is thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland, for these

poems must have had continuing relevance for poets, scribes, and audiences.[15] *Vm* deals with pagan material, and is thus an important source for interpreting the medieval Christian preservation of pagan materials in Iceland. The R manuscript is dated to approximately two and a half centuries after Iceland's conversion to Christianity, ca. 1000 CE. The medieval period was a transitional one generally, with the eddic poems as they are preserved representing the transition from polytheism to monotheism in Iceland. This transition is also marked by the movement of the society from an oral culture to a written culture, and, ultimately for Iceland, the change from a commonwealth state to being a part of a monarchy. The source materials are transitional in nature. Although the island was clearly Christian by the thirteenth century, there was some impulse to preserve the pagan past that is also evident in other places at similar and different times.[16]

At the beginning of *Vm* we are told that Óðinn of the *æsir* approaches his wife Frigg and speaks with her. They are presumably either at her home, Fensalir, or perhaps at his, or even at Hliðskjálf, all of which are in the divine stronghold of Ásgarðr, although we are not told this directly as the poem begins *in situ*. *Grm*, the poem that directly follows *Vm* in R, has a prose introduction that places Óðinn and Frigg at Hliðskjálf, so it is tempting to also imagine them there at the beginning of *Vm*, or to at least imagine that a medieval audience for the poem might place them there, but that is not certain. Óðinn is seeking advice from his wife and informs her that he is going to leave Ásgarðr and embark on a journey that will bring him to the hall of Vafþrúðnir. He tells her that when he arrives there he intends to test the wisdom of the *jötunn*. Frigg shows concern for her husband and cites the danger of the journey as a reason for why he should remain at home, but she ultimately accepts Óðinn's plan after he explains to her that he is determined to make the trip and is wise enough to take care of himself. Frigg wishes him well on his journey, perhaps sending him on his way with a magical spell or blessing. The beginning of the poem is a domestic scene of a married couple in which the wife is concerned for her husband.

As audience members, we do not know anything about Vafþrúðnir from any source other than *Vm* and places where the poem is cited in *Gylfaginning*, and thus we enter the poem somewhat blind to the *jötunn*'s capabilities. We are thus unaware of the challenge Óðinn is up against. Vafþrúðnir appears in this one poem only, yet it is an important appearance, for in the verses of the poem we watch Óðinn duel to the death with

his paranormal opponent in a prelude to the final battle that will occur at Ragnarök. It is also one of only three eddic poems in R which features the name of a *jötunn* in the title. The others are *Hymiskviða* (*Hym*) and *Þrymskviða* (*Þrk*), two poems that predominately feature Þórr in the role of protagonist. The animosity between the *æsir* and the *jötnar* runs through the Old Norse mythological works, and it is not only Óðinn who contests with the opposing forces, as does Þórr in *Hym* and *Þrk*, in the skaldic poem *Þórsdrápa*, as well as in *Alv*, where Þórr fends off the dwarf Alvíss. Loki, who is both a friend and a foe of the gods, also faces off against giants in the myths, but at Ragnarök he will show his true colors and fight on the side of the giants. Loki's ambiguity is what makes the character one of the most interesting in the Old Norse pantheon.[17] In *Vm*, as in the mythological cycle overall, the greatest challenge the gods face, individually and collectively, is their own race against time, for prophecy predicts their downfall.

Time is at the core of the present interpretation, as it is through time that a narrative can be divided and placed into units for analysis, before it is configured back into a whole. Vésteinn Ólason has written that "the concept of time is relevant to all studies of *Vǫluspá*. Time, past, present, and future, is a constitutive element of the poem as a narrative, and the poem is an entity existing in time: some idea about its place in history is a precondition of any attempt at its interpretation, although the origins of *Vǫluspá* cannot be determined at a fixed point in time. Instead the poem can be compared with an organism developing through time. It is nonetheless important to establish as precisely as possible when that development took place."[18] The same principle applies to a study of *Vm*, and this work proceeds on those grounds. If this book's primary argument is accepted—that the narrative of *Vm* is an important representation of an Old Norse myth in its own right—it will add to the critique of Old Norse mythology generally and eddic poetry specifically. It will spark further interpretation and reinterpretation of the mythological cycle in light of Óðinn's actions between the death of his son Baldr and his own death. In *Vm* the god actively seeks out information about his own fate, and he contends with a giant to do so. He is preparing for the end. The final chapter of the present work applies this same method to *Alv*, which has Þórr as the representative god contending with a paranormal adversary; an interpretation of that poem leads us to a similar result: that the framework of an eddic poem and its mythological contents complement one another. In both cases, the frame stories are representations of myths.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) writes the following, which captures why it is so important to study the mythological texts of the past: "I am not far from believing that, in our own societies, history has replaced mythology and fulfils the same function, that for societies without writing and without archives the aim of mythology is to ensure that as closely as possible—complete closeness is obviously impossible—the future will remain faithful to the present and to the past."[19] Interpreting representations of the mythological past keeps those of us living in the present and those to be born in the future connected to the ages that existed before written records were able to capture some narratives. Although the eddic poems only offer us a glimpse of what it may have been like to live in the time before writing in the North, it is a glimpse that is well worth taking.

Sources

The ages for all the eddic poems in their original and presumably oral forms are unknown, although there are various theories that make propositions for their dates of composition in relation to one another, with proposed dates for poems varying from the ninth through thirteenth centuries in their extant forms. Such uncertainty makes it difficult to determine to what extent a mythological text from the medieval period retains pagan influence, though Lindow argues "there was something special about the attitude towards the old gods in Iceland, since that is where the mythological eddic poetry was retained."[20]

Gylfaginning, a major prose text that is a part of *Snorra Edda*, is dated quite firmly to ca. 1220, the time around when Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) is thought to have written it. While the date for *Snorra Edda* is generally accepted, Snorri Sturluson's authorship of *Snorra Edda* is a topic that is debated, as it is not certain if he wrote the work himself, as a member of an editorial team which composed the work, or if he acted as a patron and had scribes and editors working on his behalf. Kevin Wanner argues convincingly that the work should be dated to the years around ca. 1220, after Snorri's return from his first trip to Norway, although Snorri's authorship of the work is only attested in the U manuscript from ca. 1300. Wanner's argument is based on Snorri's political activity and his presumed desire to convert his accumulated cultural capital in the form of skaldic poetry into political capital. In order to make the conversion of forms of capital, Snorri Sturluson had to revive or at least preserve the art of skaldic poetry, and this required the writing of *Skáldskaparmál* and *Gylfaginning*.

Furthermore, the U manuscript of *Snorra Edda* is shorter than the R^2 manuscript, thus raising the question as to whether U is an early version or a later emendation.[21]

In *Gylfaginning*, the eddic poems *Háv*, *Vsp*, *Hyndluljóð* (*Hdl*), *Vm*, *Grm*, *Fáfnismál* (*Fm*), and *Lokasenna* (*Lok*) are all quoted. If it is accepted that *Gylfaginning* can be dated to ca. 1220, it can then be established that these eddic poems are at least as old, hence their citation in that text, but it is still not possible to assign an earlier date to any of them with complete certainty. The eddic poems as they survive in manuscript form ultimately represent a thirteenth-century rendering of them and they are therefore the Christian culture's reception of the pre-Christian subject material, and undoubtedly Christianity exerted influence on the poems. Much of the subject matter of the poems clearly dates back into the pre-Christian era, demonstrated even by the names of the mythological characters. Furthermore, the historical roots of the heroic poems from the eddic corpus reach back to pre-historical figures and events that have their origins in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, during the age of great migrations in Europe that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire.[22] The events described, however, have been altered greatly and it would be impossible to reconstruct any historical event from that period based on any eddic poem or legendary saga. Thus the terminus for how far the modern critic can travel backwards in time with certainty by following the narrative of an eddic poem reaches its limit in the thirteenth century, the age of the oldest manuscripts in which the mythological sources dealt with in the present study appear. We do know what the manuscripts tell us, but can only conjecture as to the vast tradition they represent.[23] There is, however, some very compelling iconographic evidence from England that refers to the Sigmundr/Sigurðr story from the Völsung legend which, when compared with Old English literary evidence (i.e., *Beowulf*) and Old Norse references to the legend in skaldic poetry, shows us that some version of this story was in circulation by the tenth century.[24]

Even though the extant eddic poems are dated to the thirteenth century, the origins, development, and composition of eddic poetry span eight centuries when the subject matters of the materials are considered. It begins in the period when the pre-historical characters represented in the heroic poems were known to be alive; for example, Attila the Hun (d. 453; represented as Atli Buðlason in the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition) and Ermanaric (d. 376; represented as Jörmunrekr), through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Iceland, the age of the oldest

manuscripts.[25] These heroic narratives might have existed in early manifestations shortly after the deaths of the respective historic characters, attaining greater maturity and altering as the centuries passed. *Vm* is not a heroic eddic poem, however, and thus the pre-history of the poem is even more uncertain, but along with this uncertainty there may be a greater freedom to speculate about what the poem's contents might have meant to a thirteenth-century audience, and indeed what the poem and its interpretation can mean to audiences today. The story is one that is rooted in myth, not legend, and it is a narrative that has as its subject ancient myths of origin.

The corpus of eddic poetry amounts to fifty or so surviving poems in total that relate stories about the gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, and other paranormal beings from Old Norse myth and legend. Together with a few other poems about various subjects that use eddic meters, these works comprise the eddic corpus.[26] The stories that made their way into poetic form were brought to Iceland with the settlers during the settlement period, brought home by Icelanders who traveled abroad during the old commonwealth period, and finally brought to Iceland by visitors to the island during the centuries between ca. 870 through the middle of the thirteenth century. Works such as Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (ca. 1200) and the continental *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200) demonstrate that much of the subject matter of eddic poetry also found maturity in other narrative traditions, and for that reason the time that elapsed from the settlement period, when the narratives would have started their journey to Iceland, through the thirteenth century presents a problem when considering the source value of eddic materials. Narratives were altered, and comparison with Saxo, for example, confirms that there were variant traditions. A major question thus presents itself that concerns the intactness of the narratives as they were transmitted through the centuries of oral transmission, presuming that they did indeed originate in the pre-Christian period. Furthermore, the question of how the transition to the written word from an oral form influenced the stories is also a major issue. The introduction of Christianity to northern Europe and Iceland greatly influenced all the texts composed or recorded in medieval Iceland, and the mythological materials are no exception. Even if there are some undiluted pagan artifacts among the eddic texts, as Tim Machan asserts is the case for *Vm*, they are the exception, and determining which texts are the most undiluted is a daunting, if not impossible task.[27] The fact that the narratives were written down in the Icelandic language is the most unmistakable influence from Christianity, for with the introduction of Christianity

to Iceland also came the introduction of writing with Latin characters that were then adapted to the vernacular.

Though eddic poems are found in manuscripts that date to over two centuries after the introduction of Christianity in Iceland, they do present narratives that have origins in one form or another in pre-Christian Scandinavia. Much of the content of eddic poetry is quite ancient, and taking this into account, it is no surprise that narrative temporality underwent a transformation during the stages of oral transmission and the transition to writing. Like the dominant belief system, the narratives would have changed. A modern audience now reads Christian versions of eddic narratives that may once have been pagan, resulting in the paradox that the lens through which paganism is viewed is the Christian eddic corpus. The transition to Christianity from paganism was gradual, however, and while there may be at least a somewhat clear "legal" dividing line between the pre-Christian and Christian eras in Iceland, there is no such clear social or cultural dividing line. Paganism, in other words, did not suddenly disappear at the time of the conversion, and, conversely, Christianity was present in Scandinavia and Iceland in the centuries prior to the conversion.[28] The two belief systems coexisted during the period referred to as the conversion period, or the Christianization of Iceland, and the coexistence has arguably left its mark in the sources. One of the two belief systems conquered the other, however, so it cannot be stated without a doubt that what remains in the sources does in fact represent the coexistence, but the great interest that was present in thirteenth-century Iceland in Old Norse myth and legend should not be underestimated, as these old stories were deemed important to preserve and write down.

Without the narratives that do survive, we would be much less aware as to what the people before the introduction of Christianity might have believed than we are now. Sophus Bugge (1833–1907) argues that Norse travelers to Ireland, for example, picked up a mixture of classical and Christian narrative elements that they then brought home with them and infused into their own Germanic legends. In this sense, the classical tradition meets Christianity, a mixture that in turn influenced the Norse tradition. The results of this setting are the diverse and advanced Old Norse mythological narratives, among else.[29] About *Vm* in particular, Ármann Jakobsson explains that "unfortunately, it is almost impossible to determine with certainty whether the poem should be taken as a genuine heathen relic, or as representing 13th century Christian views of giants, or something in-between. We have to proceed without that certainty."[30]

This uncertainty means that in the form the poem survives it is a product of the thirteenth-century Icelandic literary culture that either reproduced it from centuries prior rather intact or modified it substantially, or it may even be a thirteenth-century creation that is now generally thought to be a heathen relic. *Vm* does indeed represent some archaic knowledge, but its form is most certainly less archaic than its contents. In other words, the story of Óðinn traveling to see Vafþrúðnir is most likely younger than many of the ancient myths recounted in the dialogue of the poem.

Eddic poetry takes one of two forms, a narrative form or a dramatic form, but these are not necessarily exclusive categories. The narrative form is epic in type and has a direct narrator who relays the action as a series of events or transmits a spoken monologue, which can be "dramatic," whereas the dramatic form presents two or more speaking characters in dialogue, and it is their direct speech that drives the action forward. There are poems that use both narration and direct speech as well as poems that use more than one poetic meter and are both narrative and dramatic. Although *Vm* is composed entirely in *ljóðaháttr*, it is important to be aware of both principal meters of eddic poetry, *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttr*, as well as their variants, *málaháttr* and *galdralag* respectively.[31] The present study is a comparative study and other eddic poems which are discussed appear in one or more of the eddic meters, although *Alv*, to which we turn our focus near the end of the book, is also in *ljóðaháttr*.[32]

It has been argued that all eddic poems other than *Grípisspá* (*Grp*) most likely have an oral pre-history, but how the poems were preserved during this oral pre-history is unknown.[33] Terry Gunnell proposes that the group of poems he refers to as "the dialogic poems in *ljóðaháttr*," including *Skírnismál* (*Skm*), *Hrbl*, *Vm*, *Lok*, and *Fm*, all share the feature that in both the R and A manuscripts the individual speakers are indicated for the reader in the margins, which supports the proposition that dramatic performance played an important role in the preservation of these works before they were recorded into manuscripts, and when they were recorded a scribe or scribes deemed it necessary to include the marginal directions.[34] The present study treats *Vm* as a dramatic work, and as such it can be forwarded that the metrical structures of the eddic poems would have aided poets and reciters in terms of memory.

Besides the probable oral pre-history of eddic poetry, the principal manuscripts of eddic poetry that survive are most likely copies of preexisting written texts that are now lost. These were themselves perhaps based on smaller collections that were brought together, although the

early written versions, it is generally agreed, did not predate ca. 1200.[35] These hypothetical older manuscripts that have not survived shared a similar fate with any number of other manuscripts that have also perished through the ages. The materials that have survived are thus crucial, and, for that matter, there are significant differences between surviving versions or fragments of the same texts. An example of such discordance presents itself in the differences, both great and small, between the two surviving versions of *Vsp*, the version from the R manuscript and the version from the Hauksbók manuscript (AM 544 4°; H).[36] One significant difference between the two versions is the number and ordering of the stanzas in the poem. *Vsp* in the R manuscript has sixty-three stanzas, while *Vsp* in the H manuscript has fifty-eight stanzas.[37] Furthermore, there are groups of stanzas that are placed differently in the two versions: for example, *Vsp* R stanzas 21 through 24 appear as *Vsp* H stanzas 27 through 30.[38] Another difference between *Vsp* R and *Vsp* H relates to a stanza that appears in the H version but does not appear in the R version, namely *Vsp* H stanza 57, in which the *völva* foresees that after Ragnarök an apparently Christian God will come and rule over the world that is reborn.[39] This Christian God figure does not appear in the R version of the poem.[40] These disparities demonstrate that there is much we do not know about the versions of texts that may have existed but have not survived from the medieval period, either because oral versions were not recorded into manuscripts at all, or because the manuscripts in which variant versions were once located have been lost, not to mention the variation that would have existed in the oral tradition itself.

Several eddic poems will be discussed in relation to *Vm*, and chapters 3 through 6 of the present work consist of a close and contextual reading of the fifty-six stanzas of the poem.[41] The theme of the wisdom dialogue is central to the analysis and therefore it is essential to look at other wisdom dialogues in the corpus, such as the one that appears in *Fm* between the young Sigurðr and the dragon Fáfnir, as well as the dialogues between Þórr and Alvíss in *Alv* (see chapter 7) and Óðinn and Þórr in *Hrbl*. Whereas the wisdom dialogue in *Vm* occurs prior to the death of Vafþrúðnir, the mortal wounding of Fáfnir precedes the main dialogue of *Fm*, resulting in the primary difference that Fáfnir knows he will die because of the interaction before the dialogue begins, while Vafþrúðnir finds out his fate at the very end. In *Alv* the winner of the wisdom dialogue is Þórr, and in his victory, he claims the life of the dwarf Alvíss, who, like Vafþrúðnir, dies by implication after the poem has ended. Alvíss

presumably dies with the arrival of the day, although this is not stated in the text. The dwarf may in fact already be dead when Þórr speaks the final words of the poem. *Hrbl* is not a poem in which life or death is at stake, but has Óðinn as the victor—as he usually is—and the only loss on Þórr's part is that he is inconvenienced and needs to walk much further to get home. Not all wisdom dialogues are a matter of life and death, and in fact *Vm* is the only eddic poem in which the stakes of the wisdom contest are stated to be life and death at the outset.

In *Hgát*, the riddle contest between Óðinn in the guise of Gestumblindi and King Heiðrekr shares many features in common with *Vm*, both in terms of form and content. Using the same final question as Óðinn does in stanza 54 of *Vm*, Gestumblindi defeats King Heiðrekr, who is not happy with the outcome. Óðinn appears in both sources in disguise, and his use of similar tactics in both contests invites comparison. *Hgát* also invites comparison with *Grm*, for in both texts Óðinn appears in disguise at the court of a human king, and in both texts there is hostility between the two characters.

Nine stanzas or partial stanzas of *Vm* are cited in *Gylfaginning*. While *Gylfaginning* is important because of these quoted stanzas, the common narrative frame structure between the two texts is also centrally important. In *Gylfaginning*, within the frame of a wisdom dialogue between King Gylfi of Sweden and Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði—three personifications of the *æsir*, or even of Óðinn himself—information about the past, present, and future of the mythological cosmos is brought forth for the audience. In both stories a guest arrives at a hall seeking to engage in a wisdom dialogue that becomes a matter of life or death, and in both cases the visitor asks a final question that the host(s) cannot answer.

Skáldskaparmál also has a great deal of mythological information conveyed within its narrative, which is also presented in the form of a wisdom dialogue, but in that narrative the dialogue is not a matter of life or death. It is rather in the form of a casual conversation over dinner between Bragi of the *æsir* and Ægir, although as noted by Anthony Faulkes, in *Skáldskaparmál* "the dialogue becomes perfunctory in the course of the work and is abandoned towards the end."[42] Like *Vm*, *Hgát*, *Grm*, and *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* is a wisdom performance in which one party is a guest and the other a host. The host in *Skáldskaparmál*, Ægir, is an Old Norse deity of uncertain ethnicity who is said to be "mjǫk fjǫlkunnigr" (greatly skilled in magic).[43] Faulkes, on why Bragi and Ægir are chosen by the author of *Skáldskaparmál* to carry out the wisdom dialogue, explains that

> Bragi, as god of poetry, is a suitable person to talk about the language of poetry and its origin (even though Óðinn is more often actually mentioned by poets and is the god who obtained the mead of poetry for the use of men); on the other hand it is not quite clear why Ægir should have been chosen for the role of questioner except that the tradition of Ægir's feast for the gods in *Lokasenna* provides an ideal setting for the conversation; and being an outsider among the gods (he is usually regarded as one of the giants, a personification of one of the chaotic forces of nature) Ægir would be a suitable person to be instructed in the esoteric, sophisticated and civilised art of poetry.[44]

In both *Gylfaginning* and *Vm* the cosmological knowledge is conveyed through the question-and-answer framework. The respective structures of these works are the method by which the thematic shape of the temporal cosmos is presented, and it is therefore no coincidence that the two narratives are so closely aligned in form and content, for they present the cosmogony, cosmology, and eschatology of the mythological world. *Skáldskaparmál* does convey cosmological knowledge, but is much more varied in content than *Gylfaginning* and features characters who do not have prominent roles in the other wisdom dialogues.

Another closely related text is *Ynglinga saga*, the first saga in the large collection of kings' sagas known as *Heimskringla*. The work as a whole gives the history of the kings of Norway from pre-historic, mythical times, up to the year 1177, when King Sverrir came to power. Sverre Bagge writes that "Snorri begins his history with the pagan God Óðinn, the mythical founder of the dynasty. In contrast to Saxo Grammaticus in Denmark, who devotes a major part of his work to the 'prehistory,' Snorri dismisses the early period rather briefly. The kings from Óðinn, according to Snorri a contemporary of the Roman conquerors (*Yngl.* chap. 5), until the mid-ninth century, are grouped together in the *Ynglinga saga*, which is little more than an extended genealogy."[45] Chapters 1 through 10 of *Ynglinga saga* should even be considered as distinct from the remainder of the saga, as there are very few verses that support the narrative (three verses or partial verses in the first ten chapters), and the later chapters are largely based on *Ynglingatal*. The first ten chapters may therefore represent early thirteenth-century ideas added by the saga's author, whereas the later chapters may contain remnants of a tenth-century view.[46]

Like *Snorra Edda*, *Heimskringla* is attributed to Snorri Sturluson, but this attribution appears in manuscripts only from the late sixteenth

century onwards.[47] It is thus debatable as to whether Snorri Sturluson is the author of this work, for there is no medieval manuscript that attributes him authorship, unlike *Snorra Edda*, which does have a medieval manuscript that attributes authorship to Snorri, the U manuscript. The later chapters of *Ynglinga saga* are, as mentioned above, largely based on the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* by the Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr ór Hvini,[48] and in the early chapters the saga presents the gods and goddesses of the Old Norse pantheon as historical human characters who came to be revered as deities by their subjects. The concept of humans reaching divinity, whether through great and often supernatural deeds, the excessive veneration of their followers, or by deliberately deceiving others into accepting their divinity, is known as euhemerism. Euhemerism is an important concept when critically evaluating Old Norse mythological sources generally, especially when considering the influence Christianity may have had on the scribes, editors, and authors working with these materials. They may have been under pressure to produce euhemeristic stories of the gods to explain why or how their ancestors "believed" in these heathen relics. The first ten chapters of *Ynglinga saga* present the *æsir* as so impressive that others then regard them as gods, and these chapters are of primary concern for the interpretation of any text in an Old Norse mythological context, including *Vm*.[49] In the present work, *Ynglinga saga* is primarily consulted for comparison of the Odinic figure as presented in the saga's early chapters.

The texts outlined above are brought together in this study to provide a comparative context for the analysis and interpretation of *Vm*, and particularly to situate the poem in its thirteenth-century Icelandic literary context. The most natural context for a study of *Vm* invites us to compare the text with *Grm*, for, as Carolyne Larrington writes, "the two poems provide evidence for the belief that Óðinn travels through the world in disguise, both testing out the wisdom of others and revealing it himself to the chosen auditor. The mythological information outlines the history and geography of the universe for the attentive listener."[50] It is hoped that over the course of the chapters that follow an in-depth and insightful analysis of *Vm* is made that considers its Christian context and extends that context backwards, reaching for what may remain, even in traces, from the pre-Christian period.

NOTES

[1] The composition of *Snorra Edda* might be interpreted as an attempt to preserve the art of skaldic poetry, or at least to extend its influence further into the thirteenth century and beyond. This impulse to preserve skaldic poetry also directly resulted in the preservation of eddic poetry. If Snorri Sturluson is considered as the author of *Snorra Edda*, a contested attribution, his quotations of eddic poetry are the oldest versions of those stanzas. On the authorship of *Snorra Edda*, see Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the* Edda, pp. 140–61.

[2] There is one further manuscript believed to be a replica of a now-lost medieval vellum manuscript, the Codex Trajectinus (Traj 1374; T), which is thought to transmit the contents of R^2.

[3] Reading *Snorra Edda* inevitably influences the interpretive process for scholars of Old Norse mythology, as the work gives an illusory impression of cohesiveness to the material. It is best to resist the temptation offered by it to view the mythological material as a coherent whole, for there are many sources that need not agree with each other. See McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 45.

[4] There is little known about the transmission history of the R manuscript before 1643, when it came into the ownership of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt. In 1662, he sent it to King Frederick III of Denmark, hence it became a *Codex Regius*, and then in 1971 it was returned to Iceland. See Jónas Kristjánsson, *Icelandic Manuscripts*, p. 23; and Clunies Ross, "Transmission and Preservation," pp. 12–32.

[5] See, e.g., Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*; Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*; and Jansson, *Runes of Sweden*.

[6] Bogel gives us the following truism: "every interpretive method must be incomplete or limited or false in some sense, yet each can offer truth and insight if it is employed competently by a particular interpreter." *New Formalist Criticism*, p. 57.

[7] Murfin and Ray, *Critical and Literary Terms*, p. 323.

[8] Lindow, "Eddic Poetry and Mythology," p. 130.

[9] Murfin and Ray, *Critical and Literary Terms*, p. 326.

[10] Roland Barthes (1915–80) outlines a huge variety of types of narrative. See his "Structural Analysis of Narratives," p. 79. Some other definitions of narrative are not nearly as all-encompassing; see, e.g., Chris Baldick's: "narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches)." *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 145. But the wider definition supplied by Barthes is more suitable for a study such as this one, which is concerned with both epic and dramatic material, since it allows for a fuller range of comparative analyses.

[11] On the origins of the R manuscript, see Gustaf Lindblad, *Studier i Codex Regius*, p. 257. Lindblad asserts that R is a copy made ca. 1270 from two earlier

collections of poetry. These possible early eddic manuscripts, Vésteinn Ólason argues, "could be dated around or after 1240, and that behind them could be detected traces of earlier copies, none of which, however, on the evidence of the handwriting features, was earlier than 1200." Introduction to *Konungsbók eddukvæða*, p. lix.

[12] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:19.

[13] Several scholars have speculated on the missing contents from the lacuna in R, among them: Andreas Heusler in his *Die Lieder der Lückeim*; Theodore M. Andersson in both "Lays in the Lacuna" and in "Beyond Epic and Romance"; and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson in the valuable tome *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld*. Heusler, Andersson, and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson all agree there was most likely a poem titled **Sigurðarkviða in meiri* in the lacuna because later in the collection there is an extant poem titled *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (*Sg*). Possible sources from which we might infer the content of **Sigurðarkviða in meiri* include the eddic poem *Grípisspá* (*Grp*) and the legendary *Völsunga saga*. Andersson argues the contents were for the most part filled with **Sigurðarkviða in meiri* and that the poem had an analagous role to *Atlamál* (*Am*), which expands upon its source material—i.e., *Atlakviða* (*Akv*), with the use of dreams, prophecies, and dialogue. For more on the lacuna, see Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, "*Sigurdrífumál* og eyðan," pp. 288–89; and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Konungsbók eddukvæða*, pp. lvi–lvii.

[14] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:19; Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, p. 309n4.

[15] McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 3.

[16] Works by Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1150–ca. 1220) in Denmark, Paulus Diaconus (ca. 720–ca. 799) in Italy, and Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1100–ca. 1155) in England provide three fine examples of the medieval impulse to preserve the pagan past after conversion to Christianity, but at the same time these three writers construct and invent the pagan past, which was a necessity for them as they did not have direct access to it.

[17] Important studies of Loki include the recent study by Bonnetain, *Der nordgermanische Gott Loki*, and the older one by Dumézil, *Loki*.

[18] Vésteinn Ólason, "*Vǫluspá* and Time," p. 25.

[19] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, pp. 42–43.

[20] Lindow, "Eddic Poetry and Mythology," p. 116.

[21] Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson*, pp. 140–61; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Söguþjóðin*, p. 77.

[22] Historical events and people are indeed subjects of the heroic lays of R, but, as noted by A. Gurevich: "heroic poetry selected only events connected with the dramatic moments in the history of individual people: the suicide of the Ostrogothic king Ermanarich (375 CE), the death of the Burgundian kings (437 CE), the death of Attila, the leader of the Huns (453 CE). Not simply the turning points in the history of tribes and peoples, but the personal tragedies of their leaders fired their imaginations." "On Heroes," p. 124.

[23] Magoun Jr., "Nikulás Bergsson of Munkaþverá," pp. 211–14; *Alfræði íslenzk*, 1:12–23. In the itinerary of Abbot Nikulás Bergsson (ca. 1154), commonly referred to as the *Leiðarvísir*, both Gunnarr's snake pit and Gnitaheiðr are mentioned, places known from the heroic cycle of eddic poetry, *Völsunga saga*, and other sources. These sights are well known from the eddic poems *Akv* and *Fm*. This suggests that there was a pretextual existence for at least some of the narratives that found their way into eddic poetry, further confirming an extensive tradition behind the poetry.

[24] McKinnell, "The Sigmundr / Sigurðr Story," pp. 50–77.

[25] On the texts as they survive, Fidjestøl contends: "the Edda consists of several collections of written texts, all of which were committed to writing after 1200. On the presumption that all or most of them have been orally transmitted before being written down, the written texts are taken to represent the oral texts, which have been composed in different periods of time." *Dating of Eddic Poetry*, p. 199.

[26] *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson; *Eddukvæði*. *Íslenzk fornrit*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason; *Eddica Minora. Dichtungen eddischer Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosawerken*, ed. by Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch. Gísli Sigurðsson (*Eddukvæði*), for example, includes thirty-six eddic poems in his edition: the eleven mythological poems and the nineteen heroic poems of R, *Vsp* from Hauksbók (AM 544 4°; H), *Baldrs draumar* (*Bdr*), *Rígsþula* (*Rþ*), *Hyndluljóð (Hdl), Svipdagsmál*, and *Grottasöngr* (*Grt*); Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði*) present the thirty poems from R, *Vsp* from H, a version of *Vsp* from *Snorra Edda*, *Bdr*, *Rþ*, *Hdl*, *Hlöðskviða*, *Grt*, *Grógaldr* (*Gg*), and *Fjölsvinnsmál (Fjöl)*. If one were to add the eddic poems from either of these *Eddukvæði* editions and the loose verses of eddic poetry from the *Eddica Minora*, which has twenty-five entries, the total could reach to over sixty eddic poems including fragments of eddic poetry.

[27] About the reception of Old Norse myth by post-heathen cultures, Ármann Jakobsson argues: "every written text of a Norse myth that we have may be referred to as a reception, from Tacitus to court poetry to the Edda of Snorri Sturluson. None of these texts comes to us directly from a heathen culture, they all provide an outsider's view, and we have to take this into account when dealing with them. Snorri's Edda was written by a Christian two centuries after Iceland became a legally Christian country. The Eddic poetry is preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth century or later. The Norse gods also make frequent appearances in legendary sagas and sagas of Icelanders, but these were not composed in the heathen era either. Even the skaldic poetry, though some of it was probably composed before the Christianization of Iceland, comes to us through its inclusion in the kings' sagas from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, works pervaded by the Christian religion." "The Roman Spring," p. 158.

[28] Christian men were perhaps the first people to find and inhabit Iceland, as Jónas Kristjánsson states: "Þegar norrænir menn komu hingað til lands voru

hér fyrir kristnir menn sem þeir kölluðu Papa" (when Nordic people arrived in Iceland Christian men had already been there who they called *Papar*). *Söguþjóðin*, p. 19. Gísli Sigurðsson concludes that the influence of the *Papar* might have been negligible: "the *papar* could not remain for long in Iceland and must be excluded as major contributors to Icelandic culture." *Gaelic Influence in Iceland*, p. 25. For further discussion, see Lindow, "Eddic Poetry and Mythology," pp. 115–16.

[29] Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, vol. 1. Webster writes that "Professor Bugge claims that the legends relative to the gods and heroes of the North give marked evidence of Graeco-Latin influence and that the old tales of the Eddas are more or less mutilated recollections of Greece and Rome." "Bugge and Bréal," p. 445.

[30] Ármann Jakobsson, "Contest of Cosmic Fathers," p. 265.

[31] Sverdlov, "Linguistic and Metrical Aspects," pp. 49–64. Sverdlov argues that Óðinn uses *galdralag* in *Vm*, specifically in stanzas 3, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, and 54, stating that the four-fold alliteration in the first long line (i.e., lines 1 and 2) in each of these stanzas mirrors the *galdralag* meter.

[32] Whaley, introduction to *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, pp. ccviii–ccx; Suzuki, *Meters of Old Norse Eddic Poetry*.

[33] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld*, p. 195; Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, p. 182n1.

[34] Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, pp. 203–6.

[35] Lindblad, *Studier i Codex Regius*, pp. 273–76; Clunies Ross, "Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry," p. 23.

[36] For information about the H manuscript, see Gunnar Harðarson, *Littérature et spiritualité en Scandinavie médiévale*, pp. 39–40; and Sverrir Jakobsson, "Hauksbók," pp. 23–24. For more on *Vsp* in H, see Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:25. Lassen adds that *Vsp* H was added to the H manuscript, "probably by the same scribe who wrote the Codex Wormianus of Snorri's *Edda*." "Scholarly Reception of *Vǫluspá*," p. 8. The W manuscript, like the R manuscript, is linked to the Þingeyrar monastery. See Johansson, "Apocalypse in the North," p. 165. For a detailed comparison of *Vsp* in R, H, and *Snorra Edda*, see Quinn, "Vǫluspá," pp. 325–36.

[37] *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 1:291–316.

[38] Gísli Sigurðsson, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, p. xxiv.

[39] *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 1:316.

[40] For more on the variation between the R and H versions of *Vsp*, see Mundal, "Variation in *Vǫluspá*," pp. 359–81; Johansson, "Apocalypse in the North," pp. 161–84. Johansson considers *Vsp* R and *Vsp* H to be variants of the same *Vsp*, originating from a common written source rather than being independent written manifestations of an oral version.

[41] *Vm* has most often been divided into fifty-five stanzas; however, the Íslenzk fornrit edition divides it into fifty-six stanzas, and the present author chooses to follow this practice.

[42] Faulkes, introduction to *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. xix.

[43] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. 1.

[44] Faulkes, introduction to *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. xix.

[45] Bagge, *Society and Politics*, p. 9.

[46] McKinnell, "Ynglingatal—A Minimalist Interpretation," pp. 23–48.

[47] On the attribution of *Heimskringla* to Snorri Sturluson, see Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, introduction to *Heimskringla*, pp. vi–vii.

[48] On the poem, Whaley states: "*Ynglingatal* 'Enumeration of the Ynglingar' (Þjóð *Yt*) in its present form enumerates twenty-six generations of Swedish and Norwegian rulers from Fjǫlnir to Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr 'Elf of Geirstaðir,' focusing on their manner of death and in some cases on their burial-place .... All the preserved stanzas are contained in *Yng* where they are cited to illustrate and authenticate the prose narrative." Introduction to *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, p. 3.

[49] For more on the early chapters of *Ynglinga saga*, see Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, introduction to *Heimskringla*, p. xxxiii; Lassen, "Saxo og Snorri," pp. 209–30; Jørgensen, "*Ynglinga saga* mellom fornaldersaga og kongesaga," p. 58; and Mundal, "*Ynglinga saga* og genreproblematikken," p. 64. *Ynglinga saga* is somewhat of an anomaly when compared to the other sagas in *Heimskringla*, for its function seems to be to narrate a lengthy pre-history, and to set the stage for the narrative accounts of the historical kings of Norway, and in this process, the pre-history begins with the migration of the *æsir* to the Nordic area.

[50] Larrington, "Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography," p. 60. Lindblad recognizes the strong connection between *Vm* and *Grm*, and he argues that the discrepencies and similarities between the respective versions of the poems in R and the extant stanzas from the poems in *Snorra Edda* suggest that *Vm* and *Grm* were likely recorded together in a common written source that would have pre-dated *Snorra Edda*. "Centrala eddaproblem," p. 16.

"This page intentionally left blank"

Chapter Two

Critical Contexts

THE PRESENT WORK ON *Vm* is situated within the context of eddic studies, medieval Icelandic studies, the history of religions, and literary studies generally. It is thus an interdisciplinary endeavor. The sources that are interpreted are for the most part Old Norse mythological texts that come down to us from medieval Iceland, and they are all treated here as literary texts, works found within the realm of letters, regardless of what their pre-historical origins may or may not have been. By looking at the surviving texts as narratives, the intention is to focus on the status of the texts in the thirteenth century in Iceland. The intention is also to breathe life into the characters in the story by bringing related texts that share common ground with *Vm* into contact with it and one another, and also to highlight themes, conventions, and symbols that are revealed through a close reading of the text on its own. As Óðinn faces Vafþrúðnir in a wisdom contest, this work seeks to slice into the history of knowledge with the blade of a single poem and texts that are related to it. What makes this possible is that *Vm* is a representation of a myth, and the study of mythology taps into a common human root: the desire for knowledge.

When interpreting a mythological text, there is not only the extant text that is to be interpreted but also a hidden layer behind what survives. The hidden layer is made up of the hypothetical mythical structure that was the foundation for the extant source or sources, together with whatever can be said or known about the environment that produced the text. In many cases, mythical structures manifest in multiple versions of a single myth. An interpreter seeking to unfold the layers of the dragon-slayer myth may work with mythological or legendary materials that survive in manuscript form, for example those relating to Þórr of the *æsir* or Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, but the interpreter who seeks to uncover the myth of Óðinn making a visit to the giant Vafþrúðnir is left only with *Vm*, its fragments, and related texts that share the wisdom-dialogue structure to attempt to uncover the myth's "essence."[1] Kirsten Hastrup writes that "myth embeds

the past in the present."[2] For the immediate context this embedding is on two levels: the version of the myth that was recorded during the thirteenth century in Iceland into manuscripts embedded the past, oral, and pre-Christian culture of Icelanders into their thirteenth-century manuscript tradition; now in the twenty-first century, the mythological tradition inherited and recorded (and in some cases invented) by thirteenth-century Icelanders embeds the thirteenth-century Icelandic literary consciousness into the twenty-first century.

Today this literary consciousness is kept alive through literary critique and artistic creation, which for inspiration draw on the sources composed in medieval Iceland.[3] Mythology is thus still evolving, even today, and our version or representation of a myth is different from the version or representation that was known to medieval audiences before and during the transitional process from oral tradition to literacy. It cannot be confirmed that a poem such as *Vm* as it is found in the R manuscript is a recording or transcription of an oral poem, but it is likely that the mythological information transmitted in it and poems like it originates in oral culture, as similar bits of mythological information are present in several sources. This suggests that as time passed and writing became increasingly widespread, more and more orally transmitted narratives found their way into written form. Medieval people likely adapted narrative structures that have origins in older myths, and in so doing renewed and gave new life to the structures. The unknown or disguised Óðinn making appearances was a common narrative structure—part of the Odinic motif—and the various manifestations of it result from medieval creative activity. The result is that both similar and different versions of the same bits of mythological information were recorded into narratives.[4]

Time is an element that is central to any narrative text, and *Vm* is no exception. The foundation of any plot is its timing and the characters of a story all act or fail to act in time. All stories have a time that passes, that is a beginning, a middle, and an end, Aristotle's basic structure of a "plot," and each phase takes place one after the other in a chronological order.[5] These phases are not always presented chronologically, but a reconstruction of a narrative can usually place its events in such an order. *Vm* and other Old Norse myths have an action comprising episodes unfolding one after the other and a plot that results from the bringing together of the action. Both pre-Christian and Christian conceptions of cosmological time exert influence over the Old Norse mythological texts, and it is an aim of the present work to uncover these respective influences in *Vm*.

On these religious influences, Jens Peter Schjødt argues that "the poems were transmitted orally by pagans as well as by Christians for centuries, although the performative contexts may have changed drastically over time; and they were written down by Christian scribes, so of course we would expect that parts or whole stanzas of the poems might be expressive of Christian ways of viewing the world."[6] Time is thus studied on two levels: the level of the narrative, in terms of the action and the plot, and in the content of the poem, the actual bits of knowledge we hear coming from the characters' mouths. Put in another way, temporality permeates the narrative setting and the mythological information that fills it up, and how time is represented in the frame and the content can help us to better understand the myth. Before diving into the analysis, we will go through the important theoretical influences on the present study.

Theories

There are three theorists whose works importantly inform the present analysis of *Vm* and its critical history. The first is Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), whose theoretical work on narrative time supplies both the foundation from which the present analysis is made and the vocabulary with which it is presented. The second is Aron Gurevich (1924–2006), whose criticism of medieval Icelandic literature extrapolates from the texts and reaches into the social, religious, legal, and political spheres of the society in which they were created. And thirdly, the works of Mircea Eliade (1907–86) are indispensable to the present study because of his penetrating observation of temporal organization in both pagan and Christian societies and his informative commentary on the hybridity of temporal organization in medieval societies. Medieval Iceland was a place where time was conceptualized as hybrid—both chronological and non-chronological; pagan and Christian—and this temporal hybridity can be identified in the narrative of *Vm*.[7] These different notions of time are not only the result of pre-Christian and Christian influences, but are also natural and observable by anyone at any moment. For instance, any human naturally observes the cyclical repetition of the day while also being aware of the linear pattern of a beginning and an end to a life. The objective here is to uncover degrees of emphasis in Old Norse poetry.

Ricoeur draws extensively on the work of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) for his theory of narrative temporality. Like his predecessor asserted is the case for Being and Time, Ricoeur forwards that there are multiple

levels of temporality in all narratives, and although time is not always presented chronologically in a narrative, that does not mean that time is non-chronological, but rather that a deeper experience of time is present. Ricoeur makes three working hypotheses: the first is that time and narrative are closely related. He argues that "temporality [is] that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal."[8] This "structural reciprocity" is frequently overlooked because it is most often taken for granted that narrative occurs within a time frame that is a linear succession of instants, one following the other. This is one of the assumptions that Ricoeur seeks to overturn in regards to narrative time. On the other hand, philosophers who write on time often overlook narrative when considering time and have turned to physics and cosmology rather than to narrative for their answers. Thus, time and narrative need to be reconciled. Once this reconciliation is made, critics may more effectively understand both time and narrative.

The second working hypothesis is that there are three degrees of temporal organization. The first degree is of time as that "in" which events take place. This "within-time-ness" is different than linear time, but it is most often thought of as linear because of its "datable, public, and measurable nature and as a result of its dependence on points of reference in the world." The second degree is time as "historicality," which is different than "within-time-ness" in that it is characterized by an "emphasis placed on the weight of the past and, even more, in terms of the power of recovering the 'extension' between birth and death in the work of 'repetition.'" Heidegger, Ricoeur suggests, invites us to go beyond historicality "to the point at which temporality springs forth in the plural unity of future, past, and present." This third degree is time as "temporality," the deepest level.[9]

These two hypotheses, (i) the reciprocity of time and narrative and (ii) the three degrees of temporality (within-time-ness, historicality, and temporality), are used by Ricoeur to conduct an analysis of both time and of narrative. The third working hypothesis concerns the role of narrative. Ricoeur argues that (iii) a plot as a narrative structure functions to connect the actions of a story, thus making the series of events into a story, and the plot also places the reader at the crossroads of time and narrative. With these three working hypotheses in place, Ricoeur now moves on to outline two theories, one for time and the other for narrative.

For his theory of time Ricoeur again refers to "within-time-ness," specifically to how it is marked by human concern for and preoccupation

with time because it means that we are "in" time. The most natural preoccupation is the daily cycle (as noted: observable by all), marked out by the passage of the sun across the sky. This leads to time being calculated as a progression of instants, of days and derivations of a day. Ricoeur argues that "if within-time-ness is so easily interpreted in terms of the ordinary representation of time, this is because the first measurements of the time of our preoccupation are borrowed from the natural environment—first of all from the play of light and of the seasons. In this respect the day is the most natural of all measures." We are thus led to the conclusion that time is a progression of instants because we have been guided toward such measurements by the natural environment around us, not because time is naturally or necessarily arranged in such a way. The same calculations result from observing the phases of the moon, which leads to a lunar conception of time. In the modern age the result has been that time is thought of as a progression and "now" is equivalent to what the clock reads: "as a result of certain practical circumstances, this interpretation is bent in the direction of the representation of linear time."[10]

For his theory of narrative, Ricoeur forwards that the time of the simplest story does not match with the conception of time as a series of instants that follow one after the other, that of "within-time-ness." To follow a story, Ricoeur argues, essentially means to understand the succession of actions, thoughts, and feelings that are presented in a sequence that moves toward "the end," a conclusion that is accepted by the audience, especially when looking back upon the actions, thoughts, and feelings that led to it. Therefore, even though a narrative is often followed in succession—that is, in the first degree of "within-time," at the end it can be looked back upon, even read backwards, in the second degree of "historicality."[11] The art of storytelling is the placing of a narrative in time, and must use both "within-time-ness" and "historicality." The characters in stories must themselves reckon with time.

The author who creates the temporal framework and the audience who follow it are thus separated from the characters by an awareness of the narrative time. Dramatic dialogue can somewhat blur these lines of separation by giving audiences an illusion of "within-time-ness" as they follow the narrative along with the characters, and, likewise, if characters have a knowledge of Fate, for example, in dramatic or epic narrative they may then have some awareness of the "historicality" of a narrative, which likewise blurs the separation between the characters and the author or the audience. Again, as above, the unit of the day is the most natural

referential unit of time in a narrative, and the result is that the time of a narrative is public time, observable and recognizable by all, like the human experience of "within-time-ness." The narrative genre of the heroic epic is more than any other form a narrative of preoccupation, in that the protagonist must throughout the narrative reckon with time. This is important for the present study, because several texts discussed below, including *Vm*, share many features with the heroic epic. In *Vm*, Óðinn is on a quest, one that he is apparently in control of, and the objective of his quest is to contend with Vafþrúðnir in a wisdom contest about the cosmos.

It is thus important to be able to interpret the action that makes up a story, which is usually but not always presented in the form of several episodes or scenes. Ricoeur states: "every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events."[12] The "episodic dimension" can be referred to as the action of a story, which follows "within-time-ness"; the "configurational dimension" can be referred to as the plot, which follows "historicality"; and the resulting narrative which combines action and plot is "temporality." The function of the plot is to configure the action into the narrative, or, in other words, the plot assembles the action.

The result of this "twofold structure" of a narrative (plot and action; "within-time-ness" and "historicality"; "episodic" and "configurational" dimensions) is that "the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events and that in turn the configurational dimension cannot overcome the episodic dimension without suppressing the narrative structure itself."[13] It is left to the reader to unfold the narrative structure in order to, firstly, identify the episodic structure (the action) of the narrative (i.e., the experience of "within-time-ness"), which in the case of *Vm* is made up of a number of acts and scenes; looking at this process analytically approximates "historicality," since it involves consideration of a conclusion and how it was reached, or movement to the present moment (the conclusion) from the past that has produced it. The "configurational dimension" (i.e., "historicality"), however, having grouped together the action, produces a single thought: "the configurational arrangement makes the succession of events into significant wholes that are the correlate of the act of grouping together. Thanks to this reflective act—in the sense of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*—the whole plot may be translated

into one 'thought.'" The thought may be the theme or point of the narrative, or some other unit of comprehension, but is ultimately "temporality." Ricoeur concludes that "the correlation between thought and plot supersedes the 'then' and 'and then' of mere succession."[14] Thus the configurational dimension is just as important as the episodic dimension when it comes to the act of critical interpretation and comprehension on the part of the audience.

By analyzing the episodes of a story, understanding its conclusion, and coming to terms with the story's "thought," the story is placed in memory, having been acted upon by all three degrees of time. For example, if one was to ask another to tell the story of Vafþrúðnir's death (i.e., to relate the "thought" of *Vm*), the storyteller might begin by going back in narrative time to the arrival of Óðinn at the hall of Vafþrúðnir, or even further back in narrative time to Óðinn's discussion with Frigg before departing for Vafþrúðnir's hall, and then from that point move forward through the actions that result in the death of Vafþrúðnir and Óðinn's success, but it all began with a reference to Vafþrúðnir's death. The beginning of the story can be found in its end, and any of its details be read alone, free from the context of the poem's narrative, if the thought of the story that is brought forth by the configurational dimension is understood: "memory, accordingly, *repeats* the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of time as 'stretching-along' between a beginning and an end."[15] The combination of "within-time-ness" and "historicality," or as the terminology I use in the study has it, the "episodic" and the "configurational" dimensions, produces the meaning of a text. Narratives combine these temporal dimensions, and when a story is analyzed closely, its interpreter reaches an understanding of a deeper aspect of time as "temporality." To arrive at this meaning, the threefold dimension of narrative time needs to be understood.

The concepts from Ricoeur that are most important for the present work are those of the episodic dimension of narrative time, the configurational dimension of narrative time, and the meaning of the story that can be construed by considering both dimensions.[16] I choose these terms over "within-time-ness," "historicality," and "temporality" because they seem most easily applied to the literary interpretation of a dramatic mythological text such as *Vm*, which is broken into "episodes" that are "configured" into a whole. The close reading of *Vm* that follows greatly depends on these theoretical principles, and Ricoeur's three hypotheses—(i) time and narrative are reciprocal; (ii) there are three degrees of temporality; and (iii) the narrative structure of the plot pulls the events of a story together

and places the reader at the crossroads of time and narrative—are instrumental to our search for the meaning of *Vm* on all three levels cited in the introduction to the present work: the literary level, the historical level, and the critical level.[17]

Gurevich, like Ricoeur, argues that the natural environment greatly influenced the primary conception of time held by people living in agrarian societies in the ancient and medieval periods.[18] To a large extent this results from the sun's "regular repetition, rhythmic and circular, which [the inhabitants] were in no position to control; and this eternal return was bound to take a central place in the minds of man, both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages."[19] The eternal return of the sun correlates to an extent with the experience of "within-time-ness" that Ricoeur discusses, but rather than conceptualized as a linear succession of instants that accumulates one day after another, Gurevich emphasizes the repetition and return of the same cycle over and over again. The "central place" Gurevich refers to finds its natural expression in the myth-making and storytelling of various societies which throughout the history of humankind have sought to understand the cosmogony and eschatology of the world. For the pre-Christian North such expression may have been presented in the supposed original and perhaps oral myths that are the foundation for the extant Norse mythological texts, which, as they are now, are representative of the thirteenth-century Icelandic reception of the myths, and are what we refer to here as mythical representations: they are representations of myths, not myths themselves. Experience of the natural cycle of the passing of the sun through the sky, the cycles of the moon, and the change from one season to another along with the inevitable return of the seasons influences the human experience of the world for ancient, medieval, and modern humans, and in the medieval period the introduction of the Christian religion in Iceland had the effect of adding an element to this eternal return; that is, the eschatological vision. Gurevich continues, reflecting on the connection between human beings and their natural environment, and he emphasizes the importance of the influence of nature for the understanding of time: "in an agrarian community, time was determined above all by the rhythms of nature."[20] Thirteenth-century Iceland was indeed an agrarian society. In their stories, the people of medieval Iceland recorded their history, and at least traces of a system can be found in their mythological texts that was used to explain or to try to understand what they experienced in their everyday lives, though the Christian ideology also made an impact.

Gurevich also emphasizes the great age of the eddic poems in support of their importance as sources for the past. As textual artifacts they are a valuable source for understanding the experiences that pagans might have had in relation to their environment during the centuries prior to the manuscript age in Iceland. He writes:

> the Elder Edda, which has reached us in manuscripts from the 13th century, represents, as is well known, the last phase of an extremely long existence as an epos throughout the centuries, and this fact raises for us the question of its complicated stratification. In the eddic songs deep imprints of the turnabouts and the views of life of the Germanic peoples must have been left, stretching over epoques, whose origin will have to be sought in the centuries preceding the Great Migrations, and whose end falls in the High Middle Ages.[21]

The time span referred to by Gurevich is up to eight or nine centuries in duration and it is perhaps a fanciful argument that a poem surviving from the thirteenth century can provide deep insight into events that occurred that far back in time. Some early runic inscriptions do in fact show that the names of some gods (at least Óðinn, and possibly Þórr and Loki) and some heroic legends existed in verse form as early as the late sixth century.[22] Nonetheless, as the present study proceeds it is important to keep this skepticism in mind, because the alleged source value of the eddic poems, and, for that matter, other Old Norse-Icelandic literary texts, is an important topic. Gurevich is one of the foremost theorists to have drawn on eddic texts to reach grand conclusions about what the poetic and prose works may be able to tell us about the pre-history of the people who composed them. As with all grand theories, it is important to tread cautiously, but Gurevich's emphasis on the cyclical nature of time in the medieval period is an important contribution to the present study, and it is crucial to the search for the meaning of *Vm* on the historical level.

Eliade, like his contemporary Gurevich, contends that in the medieval period the cyclical view of time that had primarily been held by those in agrarian societies before the introduction of Christianity—due, of course, to the eternal repetition of the sun, the seasons, and the moon—became incorporated with the more linear Christian view. Christianity recognizes definite dates, such as the creation of the world in the book of Genesis, the birth and death days of Jesus Christ according to the Gospels, not to mention the endless speculations on the coming Day of Judgment. These dates, although debated considerably during the medieval period, fall

onto a linear timeline and undercut or at least influenced the cyclical view considerably, resulting in a hybrid view of time which prevailed during the medieval period. According to Arno Borst (1925–2007), "even when the length of a year was still being measured by the orbit of the sun, according to a natural and cyclical phenomenon, the succession of years following Christ formed into a straight line; one might even call it an arrow, for, starting with the birth of the Saviour, the centuries following aimed straight at his second coming in the Last Judgement, and the end of the world."[23] Even though linear, the Christian conception has built within it a fixed repetition of six ages which are envisioned as parallel to the six days of creation. The sixth age, the ever-shortening historical present during the medieval period, in this conception is the age of humankind, the final age before Doomsday.

The medieval period was thus truly a time of transition. Regarding these transitional centuries, Eliade argues that "the Middle Ages are dominated by the eschatological conception (in its two essential moments: the creation and the end of the world), complemented by the theory of cyclic undulation that explains the periodic return of events."[24] By the eschatological conception, Eliade refers to the tendency to view the present as a moment in time along a historical continuum, a continuum that is itself composed of cycles. The combination of the two world views, the pre-Christian and cyclical along with the Christian and linear, creates a very interesting dynamic when analyzing Old Norse mythological sources, for as the present study hopes to demonstrate, there is evidence surviving in the sources that illustrates the influences of pre-Christian mythology and Christianity. In *Vm* there is the impression of two conceptions of time, the linear and the cyclical. The cyclical conception of time has not completely faded in the shadow of the linear, and recognizing the cyclical element in *Vm* may help to shed light on the potential source value of the poem for pre-Christian belief in Scandinavia, and possibly set a precedent for further studies of eddic poetry that would unfold the layers of the narrative using Ricoeur's narrative theory. To be clear, the eschatological view is not exclusive to Christianity, but with the new belief system came an increased emphasis on the end of times.

Referring specifically to New Year's rituals, and the symbolic act of re-creation, Eliade forwards that the need for a periodic regeneration points to a repetition of the cosmogonic act, a new Creation.[25] In the modern era, now in the twenty-first century, New Year's rituals remain and have not been replaced by the encroachment of an eschatological world view.

Thus, rather than being solely viewed as a transitional age, the medieval period may in fact be viewed as laying the foundations for the modern era in which the influence of nature and the cyclical repetition of the days, the months, the seasons, and the years is combined with the arrow of time that leads toward the Day of Judgment in the future.[26] The transitory nature of the medieval period is also marked by the prevailing medieval conception of time and history as divided into a number of ages, as noted above in reference to the six great ages of Christian thought. Theories of great cosmic cycles were common in many archaic civilizations. In ancient cultures, the regenerative act continued *ad infinitum* whereas medieval and modern cultures adhere to finite time and the cycle is fixed at one repetition. Two paradigms thus remain: ancient cyclical time on the one hand and limited cyclical time on the other. In the former, the originary "golden age" is recoverable an infinite number times, whereas in the latter the "golden age" is recoverable only once.[27] The cyclical model did not give way all at once to the linear model, but the linear model limited the number of repetitions of the great world ages to one single repetition. While there was still the possibility for repetition, after the introduction of Christianity it is a fixed repetition rather than an eternal return.

The above three theorists, Ricoeur, Gurevich, and Eliade, are guides for the present interpretation of *Vm*, and even though their work helps construct our analytical lens, they are not authorities. With their ideas in mind, I now turn to the most relevant criticism in Old Norse mythology and eddic studies before beginning the analysis of *Vm*.

Critiques

The topics I address in this section relate to the critical tradition of eddic studies and primarily concern source value, origins, and narrative temporality. As the tradition of eddic scholarship is full of valuable contributions, only a few of the most important in relation to the present study of *Vm* are outlined here, while many more are introduced in the chapters that follow. It is important to note, however, that in the present review of the critical history, scholarship and reception sometimes overlap. Joseph Harris writes that "not every engagement with eddic poetry, even every serious engagement, is to be counted as scholarship. We reserve the word 'reception' for engagements intended for popular, artistic, and political purposes." Harris then continues, stating that "with this distinction established, we can say that the story of *professional scholarship* on eddic poetry begins, arguably,

in the decade around 1870."[28] Our review of the critical history relating to *Vm* will travel back in time somewhat earlier than 1870 and include scholarship and reception, and Harris's date does exclude important scholarly contributions from prior to 1870, notably that by Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), other Romantic scholars, and Rasmusk Rask (1787–1832).

Eddic poems are preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Iceland and later, and it can be said that the critical tradition of eddic studies actually begins with the composition of *Snorra Edda*, ca. 1220. Annette Lassen writes that "the oldest preserved witness to a scholarly reception of *Vǫluspá* actually predates the oldest preserved manuscript containing the entire poem by roughly half a century. This scholarly text is Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, a handbook on poetry written around 1220."[29] This medieval scholarly reception also includes *Vm* and *Grm*, two eddic poems also quoted extensively in *Snorra Edda*. The modern critical tradition might also be said to begin when the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (d. 1675) acquired a manuscript of eddic poems in 1643, which was subsequently sent to Denmark as a gift to King Frederik III in 1662. This is the R manuscript, and its transfer to Copenhagen resulted in the first printing of eddic poetry.

The first printed editions of any complete eddic poems were those prepared by Peder Hansen Resen (1625–1688) that accompanied his *Edda Islandorum*, an edition of *Snorra Edda* with an accompanying Latin translation that appeared in 1665, shortly after the R manuscript came into the possession of King Frederik III. Resen based his edition of *Snorra Edda* largely on the work of Magnús Ólafsson.[30] Prior to this edition, stanzas 31 and 32 of *Vsp* had been printed in the Icelandic original with Latin translations by Stefán Ólafsson in Stephan Stephanius's *Notæ Uberiores*, a thorough commentary on Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*.[31] In Resen's editions, *Vsp* is presented first in full in Icelandic followed by a complete Latin translation. The *Háv* edition is presented with each stanza appearing first in Icelandic followed by a Latin translation of each stanza. Although the three works—the *Edda Islandorum*, *Vsp*, and *Háv*—were originally published as three separate editions in 1665, they are most often considered to be part of the same work, as in many cases the three editions were bound together.[32] The year 1665 thus serves as an important date for the beginning of the modern period of critical study of eddic poetry, marking the first appearance of complete eddic poems in print, and with Latin translations, indicative of their newfound accessibility to a wider audience. Resen's publication, however, only contained two eddic poems in whole,

and it was not until over a century after his publication that more eddic poetry became available in print.

Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission published the first edition of the corpus of eddic poetry in three volumes over several decades. The first volume appeared in 1787 and included *Vm* and the other mythological poems that had not been published in Resen's edition of 1665, arranged in the following order: Vafthrudnis-mál, Grimnis-mál, För Skrinis, Harbarzliód, Hymis-qvida, Ægis-drecka (i.e., *Lokasenna*), Thryms-qvida, Hrafnagaldur Odins, Vegtams-qvida (i.e., *Baldrs draumar*), Alvis-mál, Fiölvinnsmál, Hyndlu-liód, and Solar-liód. The second volume appeared in 1818, consisting of the heroic poems and *Völundarkviða* (*Vkv*), and the third volume in 1828, which presented new editions of *Vsp* and *Háv*, along with *Rígsþula* (*Rþ*).[33] In all three volumes the Icelandic text is given with a facing Latin translation, stanza-by-stanza. With *Vm* now in print, the poem was available to a wider audience, and for that reason this edition most accurately marks the beginning of the modern critical debate that would mature over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Early critical debates about eddic materials largely concerned the origins and respective ages of the poems, and this was the case in the period when eddic scholarship was beginning to reach a certain level of maturity, shortly after the corpus appeared in print. Rudolf Keyser (1803–1864) and Bugge, for example, debated the respective ages of the eddic poems in the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century. Keyser insisted that the eddic poems originated in the period before the middle of the ninth century whereas Bugge, on the contrary, dated the poems to the period after the ninth century. Bjarne Fidjestøl (1937–1994) writes that "although Keyser was referring to the origin of the poetry, and Bugge to the poetry as we have it, 'den til os bevarede,' I think it is fair to say that for Keyser Eddic poetry *per se* is older than 850 CE, whereas for Bugge it is, in its totality, younger than that date."[34] By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the debate had largely given way to the latter opinion. On the age of eddic poetry, Bugge stated that "as to the date of these poems, there is now practical unanimity of opinion. The view held by Keyser and Svend Grundtvig that the Eddic poems arose before the discovery and settlement of Iceland, before the days of Harald Fairhair, and even before the Viking period represented by Ragnar Lothbrók, has been discarded. All Old Norse scholars nowadays agree that no one of the Eddic poems in its present form is older than the end of the ninth century."[35] Bugge's conclusion still stands, as it is at present the generally accepted view that no surviving eddic poetry can

be from earlier than the completion of the sound change that Old Norse underwent in the seventh and eighth centuries known as syncope. By the end of the nineteenth century eddic poetry was for the most part regarded as younger than had been thought earlier, and thus the change from the belief of Keyser that the poems were from the ninth century or earlier gave way to the general acceptance that the poems could not be that old in their extant forms. This shift in perception also carried with it the implication that the eddic sources were subject to greater foreign influence than had previously been granted.

The dating criteria for these nineteenth-century scholars were for the most part subjective. For Bugge the criteria stem from the assertion that the poets were working under foreign influence and the poems, he argues,

> were shaped by Scandinavian mythological poets who associated with Christians in the British Isles, especially with the English and the Irish. This is true, for example, of the myths of Baldr and Loki, of the ash Yggdrasil, and of *Ragnarøkkr* (the end of the world). These myths in their extant form were shaped at a time when familiarity with Christian European culture, and with Jewish-Christian and classical mythological conceptions and stories current among western races (especially the English and the Irish) had become widespread among Scandinavians, particularly among Norwegians and Icelanders. Such Old Norse stories of the gods are, to be sure, genuine Scandinavian mythological compositions, but they were shaped under the profound influence of foreign conceptions.[36]

While acknowledging that the poems are the product of cultures meeting and the exertion of foreign influences upon the sensibilities of the Scandinavian poets, Bugge simultaneously asserts that the poems are genuine Scandinavian mythological works. Ultimately Bugge attributes the works to Norwegian poets working in the British Isles, although in the same work he contends that poems like *Grp* may have originated in Iceland.[37] The evidence Bugge forwards is linguistic, focusing on loan words in the eddic poems from English.

Finnur Jónsson (1858–1934), who was for the most part writing after Bugge, estimates that the date of composition for *Vm* lay sometime between ca. 900 and ca. 925, a period during which, he argues, the poems *Grm*, *Hrbl*, and most of *Háv* also appeared in their extant forms.[38] This date is similar to the one posed by Bugge, and Finnur Jónsson's evidence also rests on linguistic grounds, but he does not agree with Bugge's theory

that the eddic poems necessarily originate from contact with the British Isles; rather, he argues they sprung from poetic activity within Norway, where, in contrast to settlement-age Iceland, people had the time and leisure for poetry.[39] Finnur Jónsson suggests that in comparison with skaldic poetry, eddic poetry shows a distinct lack of contracted forms that are found in later skaldic poems that can be dated to ca. 1100 and later, which in turn provides his main premise that much of the eddic poetry is therefore older than the later skaldic poems, and that the eddic poems date from between ca. 850 (875) and ca. 1050.[40] The general conclusion that can be drawn as to the prominent view on eddic poetry near to the turn of the twentieth century is that most of the poems were Norwegian in origin, and arose from an environment that was influenced by Christianity and the cultures of the British Isles, particularly Celtic culture. At this point in the critical history eddic poetry was not considered to be Icelandic in origin.

Jan de Vries (1890–1964), writing almost half a century after Bugge and shortly after Finnur Jónsson, dates *Vm* to the period between ca. 870 and ca. 1000, beginning around the time of the initial settlement of Iceland and leading up to the time of conversion to Christianity on the island. In his historical survey of Old Norse literature, de Vries argues for two great periods of mythological eddic composition, the first being during the settlement period of Iceland, when the tradition presented in the poetry was still thriving (i.e., ca. 870–ca. 1000), and the second period somewhat later, ca. 1150–ca. 1200, during a period of renewed interest in the old traditions that had faded with the introduction of Christianity. The reason de Vries gives for dating *Vm* to the earlier period is that there is such an in-depth knowledge of mythological information on display in the poem. Because of this great breadth of mythological wisdom, *Vm* could thus, according to de Vries's reasoning, only have been composed during a period of vital and active paganism; that is, before Iceland's conversion. De Vries, furthermore, firmly situates the time of composition for *Vm* as during the first half of the tenth century.[41] If this is considered correct, de Vries's conclusion implies that the poem survived intact for over three centuries, as the R manuscript dates to ca. 1270. Such an intact textual transmission, particularly in oral form, would be a great feat. The arguments of Bugge, Finnur Jónsson, and de Vries all state that *Vm* is a product of the pre-Christian period and that it transmits information to its audience that is decidedly pre-Christian, although Bugge argues for Christian and Celtic influence. This critical foundation is important when evaluating

later twentieth-century scholarship. Interestingly, it is de Vries's interpretation that lends the greatest possibility for origins in Iceland for the oldest of the eddic poems, whereas Bugge argues for origins in the British Isles and Finnur Jónsson for origins in Norway.

There continued to be a difference of opinions in the twentieth century as to the origins and source value of eddic poetry. Jón Helgason (1899–1986) expresses this divide in relation to the eddic poems *Vm* and *Grm*, pointing out how some critics argue, on the one hand, as Bugge, Finnur Jónsson, and de Vries had, that poems such as these that are steeped in mythological knowledge surely date from the pre-Christian period, likely during the tenth century. Others, Jón Helgason points out, think these poems might be the work of early Christian poets who sought to keep their ancestors' knowledge alive, a process that culminates in the production of *Snorra Edda* in the early thirteenth century.[42] This division as to the source value of the poems is still common to the present day.[43] For the present study, however, there is not much more that can be said about the relative dates for mythological eddic poems, although Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's (1899–1984) conclusions on the relative dates of the poems based on existing research are of interest here. He argues that most of the mythological poems have origins in the pre-Christian period, but that it is not possible to give an exact date for any of them. It is possible, however, to give general dates for some and to position many of them in relation to one another. The first section of *Háv* seems to be older than the rest of the poem; it is older than 960, he argues, but it is unclear how much older. *Vsp* and *Lok*, he continues, are likely older than 1065, and it is likely *Rþ* is older than *Vsp*, and *Þkv* appears to have been composed in the pre-Christian period. He argues further that *Alv* is younger than *Vm* but older than the *þulur*. *Hdl* was composed between 1050 and 1200, he continues, and *Völuspá inn skamma*, *Grógaldr* (*Gg*), and *Fjölsvinnsmál* (*Fjöl*) are all young, but still from the twelfth century.[44] These are all informed conjectures, but it shows us what some of the most prominent scholars from the middle of the twentieth century thought about eddic dating.

As far as the origins of the content of the eddic poems are concerned, any speculation beyond this point is irrelevant to the present study. The mythological poems undoubtedly have origins in the pre-Christian period, but the poems as they are preserved stem from well into the period after conversion in Iceland, and for that matter estimates for individual poems can vary greatly. This results in the source value of the mythological poems being somewhat dubious when it comes to learning

about the beliefs in the pre-Christian period in Scandinavia, although, as Schødt contends, "the eddic poems (at least in most cases) are believed to have originated in the pagan period, although they are preserved in medieval manuscripts."[45] What can be learned from the poems concerns the retention of pre-Christian narrative in Scandinavia generally and Iceland specifically in the early Christian period and particularly in the thirteenth century. There is a clear change in focus in eddic scholarship in the twentieth century, from trying to estimate or prove the dates of origin for the extant forms of the eddic poems to focusing on what the surviving texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reveal about that time. Fidjestøl argues that "all extant Eddic texts are written, fixed texts, and as such their age is identical to that of their manuscripts or to the archetype of the different manuscripts. Beyond the fixed texts the poems probably had a non-fixed prehistory, but this is so to speak another state of aggregation, one of whose fundamental qualities is undatability."[46] Fidjestøl's position greatly informs the present investigation into what the extant texts reveal.

While acknowledging the importance of exploring the pre-history of the eddic texts, for such an exploration does indeed address the reasonable expectation that these texts do in fact reveal something about the past beyond their appearance in manuscripts, their extant forms are what ground the interpretation. The above theories on eddic age and origins serve the purpose of setting the stage for the critical evaluation carried out by contemporary critics and the present author's movement from time of origin to narrative time. McKinnell writes that, in regard to eddic poetry, "it is important to try to date this material, because the outlook of a tenth-century heathen poet composing about gods in whom he or she genuinely believed is likely to have been rather different from that of a christian of two centuries later, for whom they were no more than an entertaining fiction, much as the classical gods were, say, to Petrarch."[47] The present work strives to strike a balance between investigating origins and uncovering what the extant poems offer in their present form.

Criticism is related to important theories in scholarship, and this is the case for contemporary criticism in Old Norse mythology. When it comes to time, the critical tradition relates closely to the theoretical trends as outlined above (i.e., Ricoeur, Gurevich, and Eliade). On the Old Norse conception of fate and death, Margaret Clunies Ross writes that time in Old Norse mythology is essentially linear when the narratives are perceived together. Clunies Ross's conception is a configuration in the same

manner as how for Ricoeur the plot of a story configures its action, and thus the narratives brought together in a configured or assembled mythology are built up into a larger narrative. Clunies Ross, writing about the timeline that emerges when comparing *Vsp*, *Vm*, *Fm*, and *Hdl*, argues that "the picture that emerges from a comparison of the four eddic poems is one that divides elapsed time into five distinct periods whose transitions are marked by significant events. This is an essentially linear conception of time measured in human terms, though there is the presence of a cyclical element, which is not nearly as articulated as the linear concept."[48] The five periods referred to are as follows: firstly, the beginning, which extends backwards as far as can be remembered; secondly, the period of "active creativity," during which the world is shaped and, near to the end of the period, humankind created; thirdly, there is the period termed by Clunies Ross as the "mythical present," the time during which the gods, giants, humans, and other supernatural beings all live together (the major events from this period include the war between the *æsir* and the *vanir*, after which the *vanir* are brought into the divine society of the *æsir*, and the death of Baldr and its consequences, which lead the mythic present up to the inevitable destruction of Ragnarök); fourthly, there is the period of the "near future," a period during which the consequences of the events that transpired in the "mythical present" are played out, ending in destruction; and, finally, the fifth period in the Old Norse mythological linear timeline is that which takes place after Ragnarök, or in the distant future.[49] Thus, there is a renewal after the fourth period, suggesting the possibility for a cyclical repetition, one that may reflect Eliade's second type of repetition: a single repetition in which a second golden age is possible. This last stage could thus possibly be viewed as eternal, especially because for this stage we rely greatly on the narrative of *Vsp* in the configurational model of the mythological timeline, which shows possible evidence of biblical influence (see the "little Apocalypse" of Mark 13).[50] Views, however, would have varied in the pre-Christian age and through the medieval period, so the picture as we have it is most likely incomplete.

In *Vsp*, for example, the *völva* recounts the ancient history of the world and the shape of her narrative is, as Clunies Ross argues, suggestive of five phases (i.e., episodes), and the five phases form a cycle with the fifth phase appearing as a reincarnation of the former world, linking it back to the first two phases, the "beginning" and the period of "active creativity." The temporal framework suggested by Clunies Ross can be critically evaluated using Ricoeur's theory. The five phases that she outlines are essentially

episodes composed of actions that can be assembled into a narrative, and it is the construing activity of the main plot (in this case made up of events from several eddic poems) that comprises a narrative whole. Such addition, the bringing together of multiple sources, can be problematic, for the texts do not necessarily agree with one another, nor should they. This possible objection to reading the sources together, however, does not deter many interpreters from working with the material, and I rely on Clunies Ross's model to carry out the contextual and comparative interpretations expressed below. Lindow provides a similar configurational model, and while the episodic dimension of temporality is demonstrably flexible in that the division of the assembled whole into parts is somewhat different than Clunies Ross's model, ultimately the configuration remains consistent, as can be expected, for the available sources are fixed. Furthermore, the configurational act carried out by many critics may indicate a human tendency to construe whole narratives out of scattered events, a tendency just as much a part of the modern interpretive process as it was a part of the medieval or ancient myth-making and preserving process. The author of *Snorra Edda* did just this during the composition of that work, and the same may be true for the composition of some of the more encyclopedic eddic poems, such as *Vm*. A temporal model such as that outlined by Clunies Ross is in fact just as much a creative interpretation of the source texts as the source texts are themselves of the inherited tradition.

Lindow divides the temporal framework of the Old Norse mythological world into three broad periods. Like Clunies Ross's framework, Lindow's model is essentially linear, and it is helpful to consult it here:

> In the mythic past, the æsir created and ordered the world and joined with another group, the vanir, to make up the community of gods. Somehow this golden age was disrupted in the mythic present. As dwarfs, humans, and occasionally elves look on and are sometimes drawn into the struggle, the æsir and jötnar fight over resources, precious objects, and, especially, women. The flow of such wealth is all in one direction, from jötnar to æsir, and in fact one might divide the narratives of the mythic present into those in which the gods acquire something from the giants and those in which an attempt by the giants to acquire something from the gods is foiled. In the mythic future, this world order will come to a fiery end as gods and giants destroy each other and the cosmos, but a new world order is to follow in which the world will be reborn and inhabited by a new generation of æsir.[51]

Lindow's division of the temporal framework into three periods is essentially the same as Clunies Ross's division into five periods. Each mythic event can be situated into its precise period: mythic past, mythic present, or mythic future. The myth represented in the frame narrative of *Vm*, for example, occurs at some time in the mythic present, during which the gods, represented by Óðinn, acquire something from the giants. In this case, what is acquired is knowledge and in the process Vafþrúðnir loses his life. Lindow goes further than a simple division into three periods, however, and further subdivides the mythic past into the "distant past" and "near past," and the mythic future into the "near future" and "distant future." Thus, like Clunies Ross's model, Lindow's division is essentially that of five periods or episodes in the mythological cycle, which, in line with Ricoeur's model of narrative temporality, configures into a whole that is both linear and suggestive in the fifth and final period (Lindow's "distant future") of a cyclical (or even eternal) dimension, as per Eliade's single repetition. Lindow also subdivides the mythic present, allowing for the placement of events as "early," "undifferentiated," or "late" in the period, which brings his total number of periods (or "episodes") to seven.[52] These temporal models are applied in the present book for the purpose of analyzing the mythological timeline when the sources are configured together to form a coherent whole and also so that an individual myth can be placed within the assembled timeline. Furthermore, these models help bridge the divide between modern theory and medieval texts, and are important critical tools in that they use theory to present a storyline that can be understood by modern readers. The action of *Vm* can therefore be placed within a temporal framework that is built up from comparative source material (including the content of *Vm*), and similarly other myths can be placed along the timeline in relation to *Vm* and other represented myths.

The Old Norse mythological history is thus divided into episodes or phases in both the mythological sources and the critical sources, and *Vm* represents the mythological history in its content, and, importantly, mirrors it in its action. A Ricoeurian analysis thus applies here on two levels. On the first level it can be used to comprehend the critical frameworks that have been forwarded by Clunies Ross and Lindow, as demonstrated, and on the second level the Ricoeurian framework applies to the individual dramatic narrative of the poem itself, and could, furthermore, be applied to any one of the eddic mythological poems for the sake of a formal analysis; this wider applicability will be tested in chapter 7 of the

present book. The first level, as mentioned above, is problematic, for representations of myths do not necessarily agree with one another, and this work confronts the feasibility of bringing potentially divergent traditions together for the sake of comparison. For the second level there is no problematic element, for a narrative analysis using the theory of Ricoeur can be applied to any story. Importantly, this work asserts that bringing sources together for comparison is a feasible task, for *Vm* is a representation of a myth, and Northrop Frye (1912–1991) writes that "a myth takes its place in a mythology, an interconnected group of myths."[53]

Relating specifically to *Vm*, in a close reading of the poem McKinnell explores the possibility that poets who were more or less contemporary with one another might interpret received narratives differently. McKinnell makes an interpretation of "the received story" of the wisdom debate between two paranormal contestants in Old Norse-Icelandic sources, drawing significant conclusions about the connections between *Vm* and *Hgát*, concluding that the pattern of the story shared by the two medieval Icelandic texts reflects a widespread pattern that varies from one source to another. This leads to a logical conclusion that *Vm* and *Hgát* are independent manifestations of a traditional story, and therefore it is possible that they are merely two expressions that have survived of a story pattern that may have yielded many more. McKinnell also introduces "the logical dilemma" at the beginning of *Vm*, when Frigg and Óðinn are engaged in dialogue. Frigg is worried about Óðinn's safety in making the journey to see Vafþrúðnir, while Óðinn is confident, and, according to McKinnell, as they are husband and wife the two should be equally and mutually confident in Óðinn's sure prospect of success on his journey, especially taking into account that it is presumable that Óðinn already knows he will meet his end at Ragnarök and not before. Both "the logical dilemma" and "the received story" are key aspects of the present interpretation. On the date of *Vm*, McKinnell writes that "an overall consideration of the poem's argument makes it look heathen in outlook, but whether that heathenism is real or an imaginative construct by the poet must remain a matter of opinion."[54] The possibility that the story presented in *Vm* is one manifestation of an inherited or traditional narrative encourages a comparative study of the poem and also provides a good model for analyzing the poem with a close reading. Ricoeur's theoretical concept of configuration applies here, for when the action of the poem is broken down, as McKinnell does break it down, the result is a configured whole: the inherited story of when Óðinn travels as a disguised guest and

faces an adversary. It is possible to then situate the action of *Vm* within the framework supplied by the mythological sources, principally *Snorra Edda* and *Vsp*, and the critical tradition, especially the temporal models provided by Clunies Ross and Lindow. When, however, the framework of *Vm* is compared with *Hgát*, the issue is problematized, for the representation may not actually represent a genuine myth (i.e., of Óðinn going to visit Vafþrúðnir), but rather a framework may be being employed into which mythological information has been placed. It is at the core of the present argument that the action of *Vm* should be considered as a representation of a myth. When the question of whether *Vm* is a framework into which mythological material has been added or a representation of a mythological event in the Old Norse mythological cycle, it is stated at the outset that it may be both.

Vm is a very old poem, so much so that Machan even refers to it as a "Norse artifact," stating that like other artifacts the poem has survived for our scrutiny and enjoyment by only "the slenderest means."[55] This statement implies that the poem represents a genuine myth, something that has "survived." Machan adds that *Vm* "is a poem of certainty" and that its "most distinctive trait [...] is that its poet apparently has conviction in what he says. If the poet was aware of a spiritual conflict in the tenth century, there is no indication of this conflict in the story, which renders as fully alive the medieval Scandinavian world that *Völuspá* describes as passing away."[56] Machan, like Finnur Jónsson and de Vries before him, views *Vm* as a tenth-century poem, and as having been composed prior to *Vsp*.

For a number of reasons Gunnell's work on the origins of Scandinavian drama is important to the present study, first of all for the reason that *Vm* is a dramatic text in which the characters speak; the same is true for *Alv*, the other eddic poem analyzed in some depth in the present book. *Vm* and *Alv*, Gunnell explains, like all "poems in the eddic *ljóðaháttr* metre always take the form of direct first-person speech, with no intermediary."[57] Such direct speech means that in a performance environment the character speaks directly to the audience through the performers. Poems composed in *fornyrðislag* often use the narrator as an intermediary between the characters and the audience, or, as is often the case, the narrator describes the characters or the action, but it is still sometimes the case that *fornyrðislag* poems use fictive speakers. Gunnell outlines the two distinct groupings of eddic poems as follows (group a and group b):

> a. The epic-dramatic poem in *fornyrðislag* which communicates its narrative solely via poetic means, employing an external omniscient primary narrator who dominates the story, and in some cases steps forward to introduce, conclude and comment on the progress of the narrative to his listening audience, as in *Guðrúnarhvöt*, sts 1 and 21. In these poems, the characters are continuously being described for the audience/reader, especially in the descriptive narrative introductions of the "blended" narrative-speech strophes. [and] b. the dialogic poem, where the physical presence of the narrator as part of the poem is more open to discussion. Here, it would seem that rather than being told about a past event, the audience actually witness the action of the poem as it progresses; in short, they are not temporally distanced from the speech of the characters by the presence of the narrator. The lack of the narrator results also in the absence of direct character description and indication of setting and action have to be gleamed from the actual speech of the characters (and the prose interpolations). Obviously this kind of work has a great deal in common with drama.
>
> It might be argued, of course, that the prose passages in the dialogic poems serve to replace the external narrator, and thus remove the essential difference between these two types of poem. This is indeed true, to some degree, in the case of the extant manuscripts. Nonetheless [...] it is highly questionable whether the prose passages should be considered an intrinsic part of the poems as they were originally performed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[58]

Vm has a narrator who announces themself in stanza 5 of the poem, but, on the other hand, the poem has no prose passages. Gunnell writes that in poems such as *Vm* "this results in the strophe becoming an almost self-reliant, dispensable unit which might be considered to be an addition to the original poem," and that "this certainly applies in the case of *Vafþrúðnismál*, st. 5, which only serves to indicate the transition of time and scene."[59] While wholly agreeing with Gunnell that *Vm* is a dramatic text (one of the primary claims of the present book is that it can be interpreted as drama), I argue that stanza 5 of the poem cannot be discarded so easily, and the fact that it is a stanza of *ljóðaháttr* strengthens an argument that it cannot be overlooked, as it is incorporated into the metrical structure of the poem and is not merely a prose addition. The poem which follows it in the R manuscript, *Grm*, does have a prose prologue and a prose epilogue but no stanzas with narrative direction, and this leads

me to believe that stanza 5 in *Vm* was intentionally placed there to mark the change of scene, which in the present interpretation is interpreted as a major change from act one to act two, reinforcing the importance of the first four stanzas of the poem to the whole.[60] Furthermore, Gunnell's division between the *ljóðaháttr* poems as "dramatic" and the *fornyrðislag* poems as "narrative" is possibly less clear than he argues. *Vm* stanza 5 is apparently narrative even though metrically in *ljóðaháttr* (as Gunnell states), but *Vsp* and parts of *Háv*, both *fornyrðislag* poems, are dramatic in that they are the words of fictive characters who are not identical with the performer.

Building on the above critical interpretations, I argue that there is a genuine possibility for the interpretation of mythological eddic poetry in terms of each poem being a part of the whole mythological cycle. This approach is most applicable when analyzing myths in the context set out in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts by scribes and editors, though this approach is more problematic for what the poems meant to possible oral performers in earlier centuries. The grounding for this exploration is in the temporal frameworks forwarded by Clunies Ross and Lindow. Use of these models makes it possible for the myth of *Vm* to be situated within the overarching mythological cycle relative to other myths. This is problematized, however, by McKinnell's theory that the narrative of *Vm* may be one manifestation of an inherited tradition. This would complicate the placement of the action of *Vm* into the mythical present, as it is possible that as a manifestation of an inherited narrative it may never have been considered to be an individual myth, but rather a mythical framework. In order to determine whether *Vm* is a representation of a myth in its own right, a close and contextual reading is undertaken that treats the poem as a dramatic narrative that does in fact convey a mythological event as well as much mythological wisdom. The myth represented in the poem is situated in the "mythical present."

A conclusion may be reached by the reader that the poem is in fact an empty vessel or framework that has been filled with mythological information, or the conclusion may emphasize the ambiguity of this problem. Either way, the poem is dramatic, and treating the text with a narrative analysis is bound to bring forth new interpretations of important issues in eddic scholarship. This is especially true for an encyclopedic poem like *Vm* in which many individual myths are referred to. Importantly, however, when considering the mythological sources together, it should be remembered that they are not always consistent with one another when considering

the temporal framework of the Norse mythological cycle, or, for that matter, the spatial framework. Sources can even conflict with one another in their accounts of events and the geography of the cosmos.

The critical tradition and *Vm* are both under the scrutiny of Ricoeur's narrative time, which is the most important aspect of the theory, and the conclusion reached at the end will determine whether the thirteenth-century text *Vm* can tell us in the twenty-first century something about the society which incorporated it into their manuscript culture. The conclusion will also comment on why we continue to delve into matters of the past, in this case the pre-historic, mythical past. More specifically, such an investigation will provide insight into questions such as why Christian Icelanders preserved pre-Christian materials, and why we in the modern age reflect back on Christian interpretations of heathenism.

NOTES

[1] The "myth" is thus an intangible text that does not exist on paper. What do exist are versions of myths in various narratives. See Ármann Jakobsson, "Enter the Dragon," p. 34.

[2] Hastrup, "Presenting the Past," p. 266.

[3] A. S. Byatt's novel *Ragnarok* retells stories from the Old Norse mythological cycle, selecting and interpreting the myths, and at the same time creating new literary space.

[4] Hastrup adds that "both history and myth are *arts* of memory. By the very fact of their construing narrative wholes both create unity and synthesis out of multiplex and chaotic lived experiences. They are not necessarily different arts of (verbal) memory but different genres in the art of memory in general. As such they are subject to different and changing conventions." "Presenting the Past," p. 262.

5 Aristotle, *De Poetica (Poetics)*, 1450b21–35.

6 Schjødt, "Eddic Poetry," p. 144.

7 On the hybridity of time in medieval Iceland, see Hastrup, *Culture and History*, p. 17. On medieval historiography and layered temporality more generally, see Spiegel, who writes: "medieval historiography insisted upon [...] a vision that represented not only what had been done, but how the past itself persisted in the present and governed the future. Thus medieval historiography, like postmodern historiography, entails a view of layering of multiple temporalities embedded in historical process and practice." "Structures of Time," p. 31. See also Ólafía Einarsdóttir, *Studier i kronologisk metode tidlig islandsk historieskrivning*.

8 Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p. 169.

9 Ibid., pp. 170–71.

10 Ibid., pp. 173–74.

11 Ibid., p. 174.

12 Ibid., p. 178.

13 Ibid., p. 178.

14 Ibid., p. 179.

15 Ibid., p. 180.

16 For an alternative approach to analyzing a mythological text, a reader could interpret a text such as *Vm* in terms of a theory of modes of language use: (i) descriptive, (ii) dialectic, (iii) rhetorical, (iv) poetical, and/or (v) revelatory. See Frye, *Words with Power*, p. 74.

17 The only other study in Old Norse-Icelandic studies that draws directly from Ricoeur is by Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir, in which Ricoeur's theory of metaphor is applied to the interpretation of kennings. "Gunnlogi and Hræfrakki," pp. 34–39.

18 See also Langeslag, *Literatures of the Medieval North*.

19 A. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, p. 98.

20 Ibid., p. 94.

21 A. Gurevich, ["Edda" i Saga], quoted in Fidjestøl, *Dating of Eddic Poetry*, p. 191.

22 The two runic inscriptions referred to are the Nordendorf Fibula I from southern Germany, which contains names for Óðinn and possibly Þórr and Loki, and the Pforzen silver buckle, also from southern Germany, which refers to the *Völundarkviða* (*Vkv*) legend. See McKinnell, Simek, and Düwel, *Runes, Magic, and Religion*, pp. 48–49 and pp. 57–59.

23 Borst, *Medieval Worlds*, p. 67.

24 Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 144.

25 Ibid., p. 52.

26 As noted by Frye: "as many writers on mythology, notably Mircea Eliade, have demonstrated at length, mythology tends to see history as a sequence, not of unique events, but of repetitions of model or pattern situations." *Words with Power*, p. 63.

27 Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 112.

28 Harris, "Traditions of Eddic Scholarship," p. 34.

29 Lassen, "Scholarly Reception of *Vǫluspá*," p. 3.

30 Faulkes, introduction to *Edda Islandorum*, pp. 23–24; Faulkes, introduction to *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)*," pp. 15–32.

31 Lassen, "Scholarly Reception of *Vǫluspá*," pp. 11–12; Faulkes, introduction to *Edda Islandorum*, p. 73.

32 Ibid., p. 9.

33 *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda*; Halldór Hermannsson, *Bibliography of the Eddas*, p. 1.

34 Fidjestøl, *Dating of Eddic Poetry*, p. 5.

35 Bugge, *Eddic Poems*, p. 2.

36 Ibid., pp. xiv–xv.

37 Ibid., p. xviii.

38 Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 1:65–66.

39 Fidjestøl, *Dating of Eddic Poetry*, p. 105.

40 Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 1:54–56.

41 Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 1:153.

42 Jón Helgason, *Norrøn Litteraturhistorie*, p. 53.

43 Thorvaldsen, "Dating of eddic poetry," pp. 72–91; Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:49–55.

44 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld*, p. 228.

45 Schjødt, "Eddic poetry," p. 132.

46 Fidjestøl, *Dating of Eddic Poetry*, p. 188.

47 McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, p. 15.

48 Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1:235.

49 Ibid., 1:229–42.

50 McKinnell, "*Vǫluspá* and the Feast," pp. 3–33.

51 Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, p. 2.

52 Ibid., pp. 40–43.

53 Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 55.

54 McKinnell, "Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*," p. 154.

55 Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 1.

56 Ibid., p. 45.

57 Gunnell, "Eddic Performance," p. 98.

58 Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, pp. 193–94.

59 Ibid., p. 190.

60 About this approach to interpreting eddic poetry, McKinnell points out the following: "Terry Gunnell has revived the idea that some mythological eddic poems should be regarded as drama, and even if we no longer see them as rituals of the prehistoric past, it is worth remembering that eddic and skaldic poetry certainly originated as performed genres rather than as written texts." *Meeting the Other*, pp. 20–21.

"This page intentionally left blank"

Chapter Three

At Home in Ásgarðr

FROM THIS POINT ON, the present analysis moves forward with a close and contextual reading of the poem *Vm*, act-by-act, scene-by-scene, and stanza-by-stanza toward Vafþrúðnir's eventual and imminent death. The giant's death occurs after the conclusion of the poem, but the whole of the narrative is a movement toward his inescapable end. The foundations of the study include the poem's comparative sources, particularly other eddic poems and prose works such as *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* from *Snorra Edda*. The interpretation is made possible by the application of Ricoeur's theory of narrative time: firstly, a narrative's action breaks down into units of time known as episodes (referred to here as acts and scenes) and, secondly, the action of a narrative is configured together by the plot to make a coherent whole. Finding meaning on this formal level is the primary drive of the study, and the Ricoeurian framework applies to the individual poem with its acts and scenes and to the mythological cycle, in which individual myths are the episodes and the cycle is the configured whole.

On the secondary level, the formal analysis will allow for some conclusions to be drawn about the society for which these poems were important enough to write in manuscripts; that is, thirteenth-century Iceland. Bits of mythological information that are uncovered during the formal analysis will provide grounds for discussing their possible significance to the medieval culture that cultivated them. And, on the third level, throughout the close and contextual reading of the poem, prominent scholarship on the poem is consulted that is relevant to both the formal analysis and the cultural significance of the mythological information. In the current chapter the three characters in the poem are introduced, namely Óðinn, Frigg, and Vafþrúðnir, and the first act of the poem, the Óðinn-Frigg scene in Ásgarðr, is analyzed.

Óðinn, Frigg, and Vafþrúðnir all appear as direct speakers in *Vm*, but never all three together at the same time. The first scene of the

poem is made up of four stanzas of dialogue between Óðinn and Frigg, while the three remaining scenes which comprise the Óðinn-Vafþrúðnir encounter are made up of fifty-one stanzas of dialogue between Gagnráðr, who is Óðinn in disguise, and Vafþrúðnir. For the present study, the disguised Óðinn is often referred to as Gagnráðr when the stanzas in which he presents himself as such are being discussed. There are, accordingly, only seven stanzas in total, of the fifty-six in the poem, in which Óðinn is without a mask, stanzas 1–5, and in the final two stanzas, 55 and 56, after Óðinn has revealed himself to Vafþrúðnir.[1] When discussing the character of Óðinn generally, or the Odinic character in other narratives, the god is referred to as Óðinn. There is a fourth voice in the poem, that of the narrator, who speaks directly to the audience in stanza 5, and the fact that the stanza appears in the *ljóðaháttr* meter, the only case of direct *ljóðaháttr* narration in the eddic corpus,[2] rather than as a prose insertion, is significant for it suggests that either the original poet or the thirteenth-century compiler found it necessary to include the voice of the narrator within the metrical structure of the poem. The first five stanzas provide the frame of the poem, after which Óðinn masks himself. The often overlooked but utterly important first act adds a layer of irony to the whole of *Vm*, for without it the audience would know much less, specifically about the identity of Óðinn as Gagnráðr, and would be left to deduce the intentions of the visitor who arrives at Vafþrúðnir's doorstep. This first act is made up of only one scene and the action of the remainder of the poem takes place in a different land, to which the chorus-like stanza 5 ferries the audience along with the traveling Óðinn. In act one the characters are in Ásgarðr and in act two Óðinn confronts Vafþrúðnir in Jötunheimr, the land of the giants.

At this point it is important to briefly return to this work's methodology. The present approach invites a certain kind of addition that is occasionally met with apprehension by some scholars. What I refer to is the idea that the information that is presented in the poem is mythological information that may be added to other mythological information gathered from other sources. This is a choice, but does not represent what all interpretations may allow or invite. As such, it is from this type of "addition" that a configured narrative of Old Norse mythology is made possible. At the same time, it is important that all configurations are grounded in what is available in the texts of the manuscripts that are being interpreted. This sense of reservation is required, for it is possible that during the medieval period the Old Norse mythological texts did not represent parts of a

whole, but were perhaps seen as independent manifestations created by individual poets or authors across various traditions. However, as cited in the introduction, and is usefully cited here again, Lindow asserts that "a mythology is not just a corpus of narratives, but a system of related narratives with implicit cross-referencing. This system is therefore intertextual: all or most of it is latent in each part of it."[3] Old Norse mythology is a system of interrelated narratives and this study proceeds on those grounds.

As most of the poem is in the form of dialogue, the text lends itself to interpretation as being dramatic in character, with the two characters in each scene speaking back and forth, trading stanzas of speech. Regarding the arrangement of dramatic eddic texts, Clunies Ross points out that in poetic texts like *Vm* and *Þkv* "the *dramatis personae* are made explicit by the compiler, often when there is a change of speaker; in other poems, such as *Skírnismál*, the compiler's role is more extensive and embraces other functions beyond that of specifying the actors. These stage directions make the subordination of the poems' dialogues to the otherwise hidden narrative frame quite clear."[4] The speaking characters in *Vm* are, as noted, made explicit in the margins of the R and A manuscripts, but these bits of extrametrical marginalia only begin at stanza 18 (stanza 20 in the A manuscript), continuing until the end of the poem.[5] The stage directions in the margins thus act as a fifth voice that is directional in nature, in addition to the three speaking characters and the narrator. The marginal notations are the mark of the compiler or of a later scribe, and without them critics and audiences both medieval and modern who are able to access the manuscript or a diplomatic version would have very little hard evidence for stage direction to interpret. The marginal notations and the narratorial voice in stanza 5 are different voices: the narrator's is inside the narrative and the scribe's is outside of the narrative, and as such the fifth stanza is even more integral to the action of the poem. Contrary to the marginal notations, whose outsideness is marked by their placement in the margin, the narratorial voice is embedded directly into the narrative. In sum, the marginal notations left by the compiler or scribe further reinforce the potential for dramatic performance of the poem.[6]

The domestic scene between Óðinn and Frigg introduces the contest between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir. Rather than being an addition, as suggested by de Vries,[7] the opening to the poem can be seen as the foundation for what follows. Maria Elena Ruggerini argues that "the first four stanzas of the poem, which make up a prologue to the wisdom challenge between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, are not strictly necessary from a narra-

tive point of view to the scene which unfolds itself immediately afterwards in the giant's hall; but they do serve a different function, on the level of psychological motivation and the deliberate evocation of a tense and dramatic atmosphere."[8] While emphasizing the narrative independence of the first scene from what follows, Ruggerini also connects the first scene with the main action of the poem by stating that it serves the function of building "a tense and dramatic atmosphere." It does exactly that by providing the audience with an awareness of Óðinn's intentions in his encounter with Vafþrúðnir. Ruggerini continues, adding that it helps the audience "to understand the motives that drive Óðinn to behave according to a predetermined tactical plan when he enters the giant's hall."[9] The man of the house, in this case Óðinn of the *æsir*, consults with his wife Frigg about a proposed journey that he both wishes and intends to take. In *Grm*, coming directly after *Vm* in both the R and A manuscripts, the two *æsir* are again found together in Ásgarðr speaking with one another in a domestic setting, although in a prose introduction to the poem. The juxtaposed poems mirror one another in that Óðinn's journeys begin at home with his wife, and in both there is a disagreement between the couple; in *Vm* the disagreement is subtle whereas in *Grm* it is less so. The primary difference that cannot be overlooked is that in *Vm* the introductory scene is in verse whereas in *Grm* it is in prose, and, even more importantly, in *Vm* Frigg shows concern for her husband's safety, while in *Grm* Óðinn is placed in danger as a direct result of Frigg's actions.

The first character who opens the dialogue of *Vm* is Óðinn, and it is to him that we first turn, before exploring what there is to be known about Frigg and then Vafþrúðnir himself. Like a medieval audience most likely did, a modern reader enters this text with some knowledge of its characters, and for that reason while we interpret the opening stanzas of the poem, we will also explore some contextual sources for the characters.

An Odinic Quest

In the opening stanza of the poem Óðinn addresses his wife Frigg. The god initiates their conversation by letting the goddess know that he wishes to speak with her and in turn receive her advice.[10]

1 "Ráð þú mér nú, Frigg,
alls mik fara tíðir
at vitja Vafþrúðnis;

forvitni mikla
kveð ek mér á fornum stǫfum
við þann inn alsvinna jǫtun."

(Advise me now, Frigg, for I long to journey to visit
Vafthrudnir; I've a great curiosity to contend in
ancient matters with that all-wise giant.)

The first stanza immediately alerts the audience to Óðinn's chief objective in *Vm*, which is that he wishes to go on a quest to test Vafþrúðnir and contend in knowledge with him. The first word of the stanza, "ráð" (from "ráða"), is the Old Norse-Icelandic verb for "counsel" or "advise," which indicates that the god wishes for his wife to advise him.[11] The most important word is "alls" (since), as it indicates the reason why he is asking Frigg for advice, because "mik fara tíðir" (I want to go), or, in other words, Óðinn wants advice from Frigg because he intends to go to Vafþrúðnir. In these first six lines, all three characters who appear in the poem are present, but to varying degrees: the god who speaks, Óðinn (although his presence is not confirmed until stanza 2); Frigg, who is named specifically as the addressee; and the *jötunn* or giant the speaker wishes to visit, Vafþrúðnir. In the first stanza of the poem the underlying theme of the whole poem is introduced, which is Óðinn's intention to test Vafþrúðnir in the form of a contest in knowledge. Óðinn has sought out knowledge in other sources from the mythological corpus, and this poem further confirms that one of his defining characteristics is his extremely large appetite for wisdom from sources far and wide. The quest he goes on forms the myth of *Vm*, and while on this quest much mythological information will be conveyed to the audience.

Two mythological narratives about Mímir and Óðinn are informative about Óðinn's long-standing association with knowledge.[12] The first narrative that is of particular interest for a analysis of the Odinic figure in *Vm* is presented in *Ynglinga saga*, in which Óðinn appears as a human king with many paranormal and magical powers. Óðinn is in this narrative so powerful that he comes to be revered as a god by his subjects, resulting from their impression of his abilities. In chapter 4 of the saga it is said that Óðinn initiates a war with the *vanir* which turns out to be fierce, with both sides gaining victories over the other. Eventually a peace agreement is reached that requires each side to give hostages over to the other side as pledges of peace. The *æsir* first send Hœnir to the *vanir* in exchange for Njörðr, along with his son Freyr, and secondly, Mímir leaves the *æsir*

in return for the clever Kvasir. A little while later the *vanir* realize that Hœnir is not capable of making any decisions without having Mímir by his side and they become greatly angered by this. The *vanir* believe that the *æsir* have sent them a lame chieftain so they then behead Mímir and send the head to the *æsir*. Upon receiving the head of Mímir, "Óðinn tók hǫfuðit ok smurði urtum þeim, er eigi mátti fúna, ok kvað þar yfir galdra ok magnaði svá, at þat mælti við hann ok sagði honum marga leynda hluti" (Óthin took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, giving it magic power so that it would answer him and tell him many occult things).[13] Óðinn possesses the ability to make the severed head provide him with more knowledge.[14]

The characterization of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* is thus as a crafty and wise ruler, for he is able to trick the *vanir* into giving the *æsir* both Njörðr and Freyr in exchange for Hœnir, who is perhaps a lame chieftain, and then he is able to use Mímir's head that is sent back to him in anger from the *vanir* for his own benefit. Even though Mímir is dead, Óðinn can receive advice from the severed head. The *vanir* do not end up gaining a competent chieftain in the exchange, as they killed Mímir and gave his head back to the *æsir*, and Hœnir, being lame as he may be, indirectly contributes to Óðinn's increased abilities by his very lameness. Everything works to Óðinn's advantage in this story, and even though this representation of the character is not the same as the Óðinn we meet in *Vm*, the myth of Mímir's head from *Ynglinga saga* demonstrates the Odinic figure's great resourcefulness. He is able to cheat his opponents and continue to make gains even after he has been exposed as unfair, which may be a quality shared by the Óðinn of *Vm*, particularly with his final question to the giant. Óðinn's increased abilities are described later in *Ynglinga saga*, in chapter 7 when he is said to carry Mímir's head with him in order to receive important information about other worlds from it: "Óðinn hafði með sér hǫfuð Mímis, ok sagði þat honum mǫrg tíðendi ór ǫðrum heimum" (Óthin had with him Mímir's head, which told him many tidings from other worlds).[15] The Óðinn of *Ynglinga saga* is resourceful and demonstrates the ability of the Odinic figure to work events to his own advantage, and to the advantage of the *æsir*. In *Ynginga saga* it may even be as a result of Óðinn's ability to work things to his advantage that he became revered as a god in the first place, having tricked his followers into worshiping him.[16] This text therefore supplies a fine example of a euhemerization narrative.

Although greatly skilled in magic, the Óðinn of *Ynglinga saga* relies on an external source for much of his knowledge, Mímir's head, indicating that one of his defining characteristics in regards to knowledge is his ability to harness external sources for his own benefit. In fact, all of Óðinn's sources of knowledge seem to be exterior. In *Vsp* and *Gylfaginning* this theme is carried further, as there is an association among Óðinn, Mímir, and knowledge, but not in the same manner as in *Ynglinga saga*. The Mímir of *Vsp* may even be a different Mímir than that of *Ynglinga saga*. In stanza 28 of *Vsp* from the R manuscript the *völva* recounts how Óðinn gave his eye to Mímir in order to drink from his well:

> "Allt veit ek, Óðinn,
> hvar þú auga falt:
> í inum mæra
> Mímisbrunni."
> Drekkr mjǫð Mímir
> morgin hverjan
> af veði Valfǫðrs.
>
> (I know all about it, Odin, where you hid your eye
> in Mimir's famous well. Mimir drinks mead every
> morning from Father of the Slain's pledge.)

Here Mímir is the owner of the well *Mímisbrunnr*, to which Óðinn has pledged one of his eyes, and Mímir himself is said to drink from it each morning. In fact, it may be that because Óðinn has given his eye to Mímir's well, and thus added sight to the well, that the liquid which comes from it is full of wisdom.[17] Mímir is unlikely to have gained his wisdom from Óðinn's eye, however, for this contradicts strikingly with the depiction of Mímir in *Ynglinga saga*, where he is independently wise. If Óðinn's eye and the water in the well have mutually influenced each other, it is more probable that the power of Óðinn's eye originates in the water of the well.[18] Such an interpretation then agrees with my argument that Óðinn's sources of knowledge always seem to be exterior, for in *Gylfaginning* it is said that Óðinn himself drinks from the well.[19]

According to *Gylfaginning* chapter 15, Mímir's well lies under one of the roots of Yggdrasill, the ash tree that stands at the center of the Norse mythological cosmos. There are three roots that run from the world-tree, one of which goes to the *æsir*, a second to the *hrímþursar* (frost giants), and a third to Niflhel. It is under the root that runs to the *hrímþursar* that Mímir's well is located. In the words of Jafnhár: "En undir þeiri rót er til

hrímþursa horfir, þar er Mímis brunnr, er spekð ok mannvit er í fólgit, ok heitir sá Mímir er á brunninn. Hann er fullr af vísindum fyrir því at hann drekkr ór brunninum af horninu Gjallarhorni. Þar kom Alfǫðr og beiddisk eins drykkjar af brunninum, en hann fékk eigi fyrr en hann lagði auga sitt at veði" (Under the root that goes to the frost giants is the Well of Mimir. Wisdom and intelligence are hidden there, and Mimir is the well's owner. He is full of wisdom because he drinks of the well from the Gjallarhorn. All-Father went there and asked for one drink from the well, but he did not get this until he gave one of his eyes as a pledge).[20] In this account Óðinn receives a drink from Mímir's well, and he must pay dearly for it with his eye. His drink from the well then gives him wisdom and intelligence. An aspect of the Mímir myth that deserves emphasis is that in *Gylfaginning* Mímir's well lies under the root of Yggdrasill that runs to the *hrímþursar* or frost giants, introducing or reinforcing an association between the giants and knowledge. Furthermore, Mímir is said to be full of wisdom because he drinks from the well in advance of Óðinn's pledge. In both of these Mímir narratives, the *Ynglinga saga* narrative along with the related *Vsp* and *Gylfaginning* versions, Óðinn gains wisdom from his association with Mímir, an external source. In the *Ynglinga saga* version of the myth he takes full advantage of the dead Mímir's head, making the best of what has happened, and in the *Gylfaginning* myth he sacrifices his own eye in order to increase his wisdom through drink.

In *Vsp* of the R manuscript stanza 45 (*Vsp* of the H manuscript stanza 38), with the coming of Ragnarök, Óðinn seeks knowledge by speaking with Mímir's head. This stanza may in fact be a source for the *Ynglinga saga* version of the myth about Mímir's head. The stanza is as follows:

> Leika Míms synir,
> en mjǫtuðr kyndisk
> at inu galla
> Gjallarhorni;
> hátt blæss Heimdallr,
> horn er á lopti,
> mælir Óðinn
> við Míms hǫfuð.
>
> (The sons of Mim are at play and the Measuring-Tree
> is kindled at the resounding Giallar-horn; Heimdall
> blows loudly, his horn is in the air. Odin speaks with
> Mim's head.)

When the horn has been blown by Heimdallr, sounding the arrival of Ragnarök, it is to Mímir's head that Óðinn turns for advice, just as it was from Mímir's well that he drank to increase his wisdom in *Vsp* stanza 28 of the R manuscript. Furthermore, the first line of *Vsp* R stanza 45, *Míms synir*, may also be read as *Míms sýnir*, which would refer to the visions of Mímir and in turn lead to an interpretation that is more in line with the *Ynglinga saga* version of the Mímir myth: that it is the head of Mímir that gives wisdom, and sight or visions come from the eyes.[21] One of the most prominent parallels in all of the Mímir myths is the participation of Óðinn. In all cases the access to and transmission of wisdom is central to the myth.[22] Although this may seem like a long digression about Mímir in a book about *Vm*, it is instrumental when considering the character of Óðinn in relation to tasks that involve knowledge and wisdom. The representation of the Norse god in parallel texts and related contexts in which he is seeking wisdom from something exterior leads to the conclusion that his desire to go to Vafþrúðnir is logical considering his character across sources: Vafþrúðnir might have something Óðinn desires.

The origins of Óðinn's paranormal and magical abilities are also the main subject of the Rúnatal and Ljóðatal sections of *Háv*. The Rúnatal begins at stanza 138 and continues to stanza 144, and the Ljóðatal runs from stanza 146 through stanza 163. The speaker throughout is Óðinn and stanza 145 of *Háv* serves as a transition from the Rúnatal to the Ljóðatal. Stanzas 138 through 141 describe the god's self-sacrifice. Óðinn sacrifices himself to himself by hanging from a windy tree and as a result of this act he acquires knowledge of the runes. The tree from which he hangs in sacrifice is none other than Yggdrasill, *Yggr* being a *heiti* for Óðinn, and *drasill* a poetic name for "horse," which when taken together form the kenning Yggdrasill. It is not stated outright, but a possible interpretation of *Háv* stanza 138 is that while hanging Óðinn undergoes a voluntary death so that he will be able to learn the nine magic spells. Stanza 140 of *Háv* clarifies how he learns these spells:

> Fimbulljóð níu
> nam ek af inum frægja syni
> Bǫlþórs, Bestlu fǫður,
> ok ek drykk of gat
> ins dýra mjaðar,
> ausinn Óðreri.

(Nine mighty spells I learnt from the famous son
of Bolthor, Bestla's father, and I got a drink of the
precious mead, I, soaked from Odrerir.)

While hanging and possibly visiting the world of the dead, Óðinn receives "Fimbulljóð níu" (nine mighty spells) from Bölþórn, his maternal grandfather who is a giant. The drink of the mead that he refers to in the second half of the stanza is a reference to another myth of Óðinn that appears earlier in the poem, when he seduced Gunnlöð to get a drink of the precious mead. In *Háv* stanza 105 Óðinn confesses the following:

Gunnlǫð mér um gaf
gullnum stóli á
drykk ins dýra mjaðar;
ill iðgjǫld
lét ek hana eptir hafa
síns ins heila hugar,
síns ins svára sefa.

(Gunnlod gave me on her golden throne a drink of the
precious mead; a poor reward I let her have in return,
for her open-heartedness, for her sorrowful spirit.)

The myth of Óðinn taking advantage of Gunnlöð in order to acquire the mead of poetry is presented with greater detail in *Skáldskaparmál*.[23] Another possible explanation for the reference to the mead is that Óðinn receives a drink of it while hanging, or while he visits the world of the dead where he acquired the nine magic spells, and thus he is not making a reference to his encounter with Gunnlöð. Most importantly, both sources of wisdom, the mead and the runes, come from the exterior and are acquired by Óðinn for his benefit.

In addition to the nine magic spells that he gains, Óðinn also becomes empowered to create nine additional magic spells, and all eighteen spells are enumerated in stanzas 146 through 163. In this case the pledge Óðinn makes is much more than an eye, as it was in the case of Mímir's well. Óðinn sacrifices his whole body by hanging on the tree as Christ hung on the cross. If he died on the tree, his return to the world of the living is triumphant, for he conquers death. As a result of his sacrifice Óðinn has gained knowledge that he would not have been able to

gain otherwise, and he is more powerful than he was before. The knowledge Óðinn acquired during his hanging proves valuable to the wisdom contest in *Vm*.

Among the other exterior sources of Óðinn's wisdom are his ravens Huginn and Muninn. In *Grm* stanza 20, Óðinn, disguised as Grímnir, says that each day Huginn and Muninn, Óðinn's ravens, are sent out around the world to gather information.

> Huginn ok Muninn
> fljúga hverjan dag
> jǫrmungrund yfir;
> óumk ek of Hugin
> at hann aptr né komit,
> þó sjámk meirr um Munin.
>
> (Hugin and Munin fly every day over the vast-stretching world; I fear for Hugin that he will not come back, yet I tremble more for Munin.)

Óðinn's concern that the ravens may one day not return suggests that without the assistance of his two ravens the chief of the *æsir* might be lacking some of the wisdom he relies on. The name Huginn refers to thought or something of the mind and the name Muninn to memory.[24]

Óðinn has had success in his endeavors to gain wisdom in all of these narratives, and at the beginning of *Vm*, he announces to Frigg that he seeks her advice since he wishes to go and visit Vafþrúðnir to contend in matters of wisdom. There must be something for Óðinn to gain from his proposed journey, or else he would not embark on it. The audience does not have any reason to think that he will be unsuccessful in his proposed quest, as other sources that present Óðinn do so in a favorable manner in regard to his abilities. There are many mythological narratives about Óðinn and from each of them it is possible to interpret the action of the story in relation to his characteristic association with wisdom and the means of its acquisition. The above examples serve to introduce this theme sufficiently for the present discussion. At this point in *Vm*, early in the opening act, one can only expect that Frigg will encourage Óðinn on this journey, for he is successful in his many ventures and can demonstrably harness exterior forces for his own advantage. What his wife thinks, however, may be another matter altogether.

Matters of the Heart

Frigg is the second speaker in *Vm*. She is an important goddess in the Old Norse pantheon, known mostly as the wife of Óðinn and the mother of Baldr. In *Vsp* stanza 33 of the R manuscript it is said that Frigg resides at Fensalir. While Váli, Baldr's brother who was born to quickly avenge his death, is seeking vengeance, Frigg is at home weeping over the death of her son.

> en Frigg um grét
> í Fensǫlum
> vá Valhallar.
>
> (and in Fen-halls Frigg wept for Valhall's woe.)

Here Frigg is represented in the role of grieving mother, saddened by the loss of her child Baldr, the most beautiful of the *æsir*, but she is not only grieving for her child. As Ingunn Ásdísardóttir argues, Frigg's concern runs even deeper, for she not only cries over the death of Baldr but also cries for the coming "vá Valhallar" (Valhöll's woe).[25] Frigg will lose more than her son because of his death; she knows Baldr's death is only the beginning of the downfall of the *æsir*, and when Ragnarök arrives Óðinn will meet Fenrir the wolf in battle and succumb to the strength of the beast. In *Vsp* stanza 52 of R (*Vsp* stanza 45 of H) Frigg is mentioned in relation to Óðinn's death, where the name Hlín appears as a *heiti* for Frigg:[26]

> Þá kømr Hlínar
> harmr annarr fram,
> er Óðinn ferr
> við úlf vega,
> en bani Belja
> bjartr at Surti;
> þá mun Friggjar
> falla *angan*.[27]
>
> (Then Frigg's second sorrow comes about when Odin advances to fight against the wolf, and Beli's bright slayer against Surt; then Frigg's dear-beloved must fall.)

Once again Frigg will lose a beloved, her husband, and she will be greatly affected by his death and may even perish at Ragnarök herself. Both stanzas 33 and 52 from *Vsp* of R present an image of Frigg as a grieving mother and wife, and as the matriarch of the *æsir*.

Frigg's first appearance as a speaker in the R manuscript is in *Vm*. It is in this poem that her role as Óðinn's wife and sought-after adviser is most important. Frigg only has two stanzas of speech in the poem, but the dialogue between her and Óðinn foreshadows the longer dialogue between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir. After Óðinn approaches Frigg and has asked for her advice, Frigg replies by giving her counsel.

Frigg kvað:
2 "Heima letja
ek mynda Herjafǫðr
í gǫrðom goða,
þvíat engi jǫtun
ek hugða jafnramman
sem Vafþrúðni vera."

(I'd rather keep the Father of Hosts at home in the courts of the gods, for I know no giant to be as powerful as Vafthrudnir is.)

Frigg expresses concern for Óðinn's welfare, as the first thing she says is that he should remain in Ásgarðr, "í gǫrðom goða", rather than travel to visit Vafþrúðnir.[28] Her advice is clear, and her concern may suggest that she actually may not be in possession of foreknowledge of the fate of the *æsir*, even though *Vsp* stanza 33 of R suggests that she knows they will perish at Ragnarök. If Frigg does know the fate of the *æsir* then she would also be aware that Óðinn is not placing himself in grave danger by going on a journey such as the one he now proposes to undertake. In this instance she must not foresee the future as Óðinn does. She does not encourage Óðinn to go on his journey to Vafþrúðnir, as she might if she knew he was in no danger, but rather she encourages him to stay at home. She is concerned that Vafþrúðnir is extremely strong, and, as the event of Baldr's death is referred to as an event in the narrative past, according to *Vm* stanzas 54 and 55, she may consider it wise to be extremely wary of losing another of her close family, as she has already lost Baldr.[29] This interpretation, however, goes against what we know from *Lok* stanza 29, in which Frigg is said

to know all fate,[30] though we cannot assume that the poets of *Vm* stanza 2 and *Lok* stanza 29 agreed about the extent of Frigg's foreknowledge.

In *Gylfaginning* there is an episode in which Frigg features prominently that, when *Vm* is considered in its mythological context, provides good grounds for her need to take great care of members of her family when they face potential dangers. If Frigg does not know Óðinn will perish at Ragnarök, her anxiety about the danger of his proposed journey to see Vafþrúðnir is justifiably high and might possibly be related to Baldr's death. The death of Baldr is a central issue in *Vm*, especially as we know that it took place in the past relative to the narrative present of *Vm* when the sources are configured together. In *Gylfaginning* chapter 49 it is said that after Baldr's troubling dreams in which he sees that his life is threatened, Frigg takes precautions and procures oaths from all things both living and dead to not harm Baldr: "ok Frigg tók svardaga til þess að eira skyldu Baldri eldr ok vatn, járn ok alls konar málmr, steinar, jǫrðin, viðirnir, sóttirnar, dýrin, fuglarnir, eitr, ormar" (Frigg took oaths that Baldr would not be harmed by fire and water, iron and all kinds of metal, stones, the earth, trees, diseases, animals, birds, poisons and snakes).[31] After the oaths are procured the *æsir* engage in blatant hubris by pelting Baldr with all of the objects that had sworn not to harm him. Needless to say, Baldr is unharmed as the oaths Frigg procured hold true. His safety is jeopardized when Loki, disguised as a woman, goes to visit Frigg to garner knowledge about what precautions she has taken to protect Baldr, seeing that the *æsir* are all throwing things at him without harm. Not knowing her true identity, Frigg reveals to the woman that there is one thing that she did not receive an oath from: "vex viðarteinungr einn fyrir vestan Valhǫll. Sá er mistilteinn kallaðr. Sá þótti mér ungr at krefja eiðsins" (A shoot of wood grows to the west of Valhalla. It is called mistletoe, and it seemed too young for me to demand its oath).[32] The woman then promptly disappears. Loki then goes quickly to retrieve the mistletoe at the place where Frigg said it grew and brings it to the assembly where the *æsir* continue to throw projectiles at Baldr. With the assistance of Höðr, the one who throws the mistletoe, Baldr is killed.

According to the account in *Gylfaginning*, Baldr's death comes about as a result of Loki's evil intentions and Höðr's compliance to Loki's direction. An important element is Frigg's lack of foresight. She unknowingly assists Loki in the murder of her own son, which may account for the extreme nature of her grief, as cited above in reference to *Vsp* R stanza 33, although it is without a doubt that the loss of a child would

lead to extreme grief for most mothers regardless of the circumstances. It is important not to underestimate the malicious nature of Loki's involvement in the narrative of Baldr's death, for he is a force to be reckoned with. Richard L. Dieterle argues that it is due to Loki's uniquely aerial nature (i.e., Loki Loptr) that he is able to command the mistletoe, and thus Frigg could not foresee that it could possibly be a weapon potent enough to harm Baldr. Were it not for Loki, in other words, Frigg would not have made a mistake by not procuring an oath from the mistletoe. Dieterle argues: "it is this aerial role that gives Loki command of the lofty mistletoe, although we must suspect that the significance of this power reaches farther than we have yet grasped."[33] Frigg did not grasp it either, and if in fact the event of Baldr's death precedes Óðinn's journey to Vafþrúðnir (*Vm* stanzas 54 and 55 suggest this), she cannot afford to lose her husband as she lost her son, at least not yet. This reading requires a configuration of the mythological narratives that can be problematic, however, as *Vm* and *Gylfaginning* are not necessarily complementary texts (though *Vm* is a source for *Gylfaginning*), but they are worth comparing for an increased understanding of Frigg's possible characteristics. Moreover, even though Loptr means "sky" or "air," it is unclear what specific aerial powers Loki was thought to have, for eddic poets only present him as flying in one myth (*Þkv*), and even then he borrows Freyja's coat of feathers to do so.

It is also possible that Frigg was unaware of what the *æsir* were doing at the assembly where Baldr would eventually die. At the assembly they were throwing projectiles at the young god that would normally have killed him. Lindow points out that "when the disguised Loki arrives, somehow Frigg does not know (or pretends not to know) what is going on at the þing, and she asks for information. This strange request, which has elicited little comment in the vast Baldr literature, probably indicates that the activities at the þing take place in the public arena, to which females like Frigg ordinarily do not have access."[34] If Frigg and the other goddesses were indeed kept in the dark about what occurs at the assemblies that the *æsir* held, then the possibility that she does not know about the fate of the *æsir* is even more conceivable. Even though she is a deity, she is not a male, and it is likely she was excluded from certain activities. This does not mean that she does not wield great influence, even over her husband Óðinn. There is another instance in the eddic corpus where she challenges him openly and more effectively than at the beginning of *Vm*.

Frigg plays a role in the prose introduction to *Grm* that is very similar to the one she plays in *Vm* stanza 2. In both scenes she doubts or chal-

lenges Óðinn.[35] The prose introduction states that there are two brothers, the sons of King Hrauðungr, one of whom, Geirrøðr, is fostered by Óðinn and the other, Agnarr, is fostered by Frigg. When the two boys are grown up Óðinn sends them off in a ship back to their father's kingdom. When they arrive there Geirrøðr jumps out of the boat and sends his brother back into the sea with the ship and ultimately off to live with a troll-woman. King Hrauðungr is now dead and Geirrøðr inherits his kingdom. Óðinn is proud of his foster-son and speaks to Frigg about how Geirrøðr has done well for himself while Agnarr is less accomplished and has even married a troll. Óðinn says the following to Frigg: "Sér þú Agnar fóstra þinn, hvar hann elr bǫrn við gýgi í hellinum? En Geirrøðr fóstri minn er konungr ok sitr nú at landi?" (Do you see Agnar, your foster-son, there raising children with a giantess in a cave? But Geirrod, my foster-son, is king and rules over the land). Frigg does not accept Óðinn's statement and replies to him with the following: "Hann er matníðingr sá at hann kvelr gesti sína ef honum þykkja of margir koma" (He is so stingy with food that he tortures his guests if it seems to him that too many have come). Óðinn in turn does not accept Frigg's claim. The couple then decides to put their dispute to the test, so Óðinn travels to Geirrøðr's court to check on his hospitality. *Grm* comes directly after *Vm* in R and again has Óðinn leaving Ásgarðr on a journey, but this time Frigg is the instigator who urges Óðinn to leave, whereas in *Vm* she was reluctant to see her husband depart. The likely reason for her confidence in his safety in *Grm* is that in the poem Óðinn enters the world of humans, a place where he can easily succeed in the face of his challenges as a paranormal being, even though it is at the cost of great suffering for humans. In *Vm* his travels take him into the world of the giants, where such success may be less certain. Frigg actively works against Óðinn in *Grm*, as the prose introduction reveals that she sends word to the king to beware of a figure who matches Óðinn's description. This betrayal places Óðinn in danger, but it is only a human danger that the god can get himself out of with the help of the young Agnarr. It is therefore most likely that Frigg does not intend to place Óðinn in grave danger but rather seeks to teach him a lesson.

Although Óðinn is successful in his contest with Vafþrúðnir, the answer to the second-to-last question that he asks, confirming Óðinn's coming death at Ragnarök, is the first time within the context of the poem it can be confirmed Óðinn will not perish in Vafþrúðnir's hall, even though it is a next-to-sure thing due to Óðinn's record of success in verbal duels and quests that have to do with wisdom. In the opening act of *Vm*

Frigg ultimately submits to Óðinn's will to travel to the hall of Vafþrúðnir, although it is doubtful that she ever had a real chance of preventing her husband from leaving Ásgarðr in the first place. She does not challenge him in the same manner in *Vm* as she does in *Grm*, where her challenge and subsequent subversion in fact work against Óðinn, although the danger is relatively benign. In *Vm* Óðinn is very assertive and he responds to Frigg's advice with a phrase that will be repeated later in the poem as a refrain. The three alliterating lines are perhaps most potent when considered as a direct statement; Óðinn pressing on his opponent. In this case Óðinn presses on his wife who has advised him not to embark on his journey to Jötunheimr.

Óðinn kvað:
3 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaða,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hitt vil ek vita,
hvé Vafþrúðnis
salakynni sé."

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much have I tested the Powers; this I want to know: what kind of company is found in Vafthrudnir's hall.)

In Óðinn's response to Frigg in stanza 3 he states that he is well traveled, well experienced, and has tested the powers before, confirming for the audience, at last, that the speaker is Óðinn, although Frigg does refer to him as Herjaföðr (Father of Hosts) in stanza 2.[36] It now appears that Óðinn will not take any advice from his wife, the very same advice he has just asked her for. Why then did Óðinn approach Frigg in the first place? The opening scene is possibly used as a frame narrative to foreshadow what will occur in the main action of the poem, and it further allows for the "Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaða, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin" pattern to be used for the first time, a pattern that will return as a refrain as the poem draws toward its close. After three stanzas the audience is aware that Óðinn is going to travel away from Ásgarðr on a seemingly dangerous journey to the hall of Vafþrúðnir. Tension is high in the interaction between the divine couple, and the audience must wonder how Frigg will react to being first asked for her advice and then told that her advice is not needed. Óðinn's confidence reminds us of some of the subject matter that

has been transmitted in *Háv*, where details from some ordeals that Óðinn has gone through to acquire the knowledge that he possesses are given. Óðinn, as described in the Rúnatal section of *Háv* (stanzas 138 through 144), has traveled to the world of the dead—or at least hung on a windy tree for nine nights—to acquire wisdom. Óðinn's ability to harness exterior sources of knowledge bolsters his confidence in his journey to contest with the powerful giant, and it is most likely that Óðinn already knows he is fated to die at Ragnarök.

Frigg replies to Óðinn's assertiveness by wishing him well on his journey. She does not try to persuade her husband any further to remain in Ásgarðr, and whether motivated by concern or not, she supportively sees him off on his journey with words of support.

Frigg kvað:
4 "Heill þú farir!
heill þú aptr komir!
heill þú á sinnum sér!
œði þér dugi,
hvars þú skalt, Aldafǫðr,
orðum mæla jǫtun."

(Journey safely! Come back safely! Be safe on the way!
May your mind be sufficient when, Father of Men, you
speak with the giant.)

The phrase "orðum mæla" indicates that Frigg is aware of the nature of the intended meeting between her husband and his adversary: that it will be a contest of words. Her use of a formula in parting is a response to Óðinn's statement that he is well traveled and experienced. Perhaps this indicates that she still thinks he needs to be wished good luck. Ruggerini argues that with her words, Frigg "makes a mental counterpoint to the threefold formula used by the god in the preceding stanza, in the shared knowledge that his 'much travelling,' 'much asking' and 'much testing' are always associated with dangers, trials and hardships."[37] What is more, in her reply, Frigg also matches the alliterative pattern that Óðinn initiated in stanza 3.[38] Perhaps the confidence he displays with his words in the previous stanza has convinced Frigg that he will fare well on his journey, or, on the other hand, his assertiveness has possibly left Frigg with no choice but to accept that he is in fact going on the journey regardless of her advice. She may still be concerned for his safety while he is gone, considering the

death of Baldr and her exclusion from the courts of men, and thus knows she must give him the best send-off she can. In *Grm*, even though she challenges him and seemingly sends him into a dangerous situation that she makes worse, she knows that he will be alright because he will only face human dangers. Frigg's response in *Vm* stanza 4 is a resignation from her position in stanza 2, and all that she can do is hope her husband's journey goes well, for Óðinn has demonstrated that he will travel as he sees fit. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir defines Frigg's role in the poem as one of safety and security; she does not want to take risks. Furthermore, as she is stationary, not leaving Ásgarðr, the image of her in *Vm* resembles the image of her in *Vsp*, where she sits in Fensalir and cries.[39]

Ilya V. Sverdlov has made a detailed analysis of the metrical constructions of the *ljóðaháttr* stanzas in *Vm* and in particular the refrain "Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaða, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin" that Óðinn declares seven times, including the instance in stanza 3. Sverdlov concludes that the construction is in fact a crafty and magical maneuver used by Óðinn to force Vafþrúðnir into forgetting the rules of the contest.[40] Taking this into consideration, it is notable that the same formulaic phrase is used in stanza 3 by Óðinn in his dialogue with Frigg, which may foreshadow Óðinn's ability to steer the course of events with his own determination and crafty command of language. Óðinn's success in getting Frigg on his side in *Vm* stanzas 1 through 4 thus foreshadows his eventual success in the wisdom contest that follows. Assuming this to be the case, Óðinn may have in fact tricked his wife into obediently accepting that he is leaving Ásgarðr and embarking on his journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall, just as he will later trick Vafþrúðnir into conceding the contest.

Frigg also appears in *Ynglinga saga* chapter 3, and her role in that narrative may, like the other mythological sources referred to for context of her character, help support the interpretation of Frigg's actions in *Vm*. In *Ynglinga saga* it is said that while Óðinn is away on a long journey his two brothers Víli and Vé separated his inheritance between them and also shared his wife Frigg between them: "Óðinn átti tvá brœðr. Hét annarr Vé, en annarr Vílir. Þeir brœðr hans stýrðu ríkinu, þá er hann var í brottu. Þat var eitt sinn, þá er Óðinn var farinn langt í brot ok hafði lengi dvalzk, at Ásum þótti ørvænt hans heim. Þá tóku brœðr hans at skipta arfi hans, en konu hans, Frigg, gengu þeir báðir at eiga. En litlu síðar kom Óðinn heim. Tok hann þá við konu sinni" (Óthin had two brothers. One was called Vé, and the other, Víli. These, his brothers, governed the realm when he was gone. One time when Óthin was gone to a great distance, he stayed away

so long that the Æsir thought he would never return. Then his brothers began to divide his inheritance; but his wife Frigg they shared between them. However, a short while afterwards, Óthin returned and took possession of his wife again).[41] In *Ynglinga saga* Frigg appears as a subservient wife to Óðinn so that even in his absence she is a part of his property and remains under the protection of his brothers until his return. She did not have a say in the matter, as she ultimately does not have a say about whether Óðinn travels or does not travel in *Vm*. It is thus quite possible, reading the sources together, that rather than having to trick Frigg into accepting his plan, Óðinn simply needed to exert his authority over her to make her accept his plan. The story of Frigg as the shared property of Óðinn's brothers in his absence is presumably referred to in *Lok* stanza 26 when, while accusing all of the *æsir* of their misdeeds, Loki tells Frigg that while she was Óðinn's wife she had slept with his brothers Víli and Vé. Loki, of course, means this to be an insult on her character.

> "Þegi þú, Frigg!
> þú ert Fjǫrgyns mær
> og hefir æ vergjǫrn verit,
> er þá Véa ok Vilja
> léztu þér, Viðris kvæn,
> báða í baðm um tekit."
>
> (Be silent, Frigg, you're Fiorgyn's daughter and you've always been man-mad: Ve and Vili, Vidrir's wife, you took them both in your embrace.)

Ynglinga saga chapter 3 adds to this account that when Óðinn returns from his journey he reclaims Frigg as his wife. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir concludes her account of Frigg's appearance in *Ynglinga saga* by pointing out that in that narrative Frigg has very little to say about her own destiny, and that this feature is actually a prominent aspect of Frigg's characterization in Snorri's work: she is a relatively inactive character other than in the narrative of Baldr's death in *Gylfaginning*,[42] where her actions have a disastrous impact for her and the *æsir*.

Considering the narratives that have been drawn together that include Frigg, it can be said that overall she is a supportive wife of Óðinn, taking the prose prologue to *Grm* as an extreme exception. She is ultimately supportive of him in *Vm*, and she wishes him well on his quest to see Vafþrúðnir. She also demonstrates concern and ultimately hope

that he will return in one piece. It is possible that Frigg is indeed wise in trying to dissuade Óðinn from making his trip to Jötunheimr to engage Vafþrúðnir, for in defeating the giant Óðinn is moving closer to his own defeat by Fenrir at Ragnarök and possibly also brings all of the *æsir* closer to their own deaths. In this sense, knowledge of the future may only draw the future closer to the present. That is, however, Óðinn's primary motive in the poem: to prepare for the eventual end, his own imminent death.

Although a minor character in the poem with only two stanzas of speech, Frigg's role in the narrative is symbolic of the coming of Ragnarök, as is the poem on the whole.[43] The first four stanzas serve as a prelude to the verbal battle between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, and the battle between the god and the giant foreshadows the final battle between the gods and the giants in the mythological cycle. Frigg is scared for her husband at the beginning and no one can blame her for it, but ultimately she concedes to his will. These four introductory stanzas provide the frame within which Óðinn makes his journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall. The giant, who is not yet present in the narrative, is already known by the audience to be a powerful figure. It is also possible that Frigg's blessing in *Vm* stanza 4 should be interpreted as a protective magic charm in the same manner as the one Svipdagr asks his mother for in *Gg* stanza 5. Such a scenario would explain why Óðinn pretends to seek her advice while intending to disregard it. If Óðinn also uses magic in his refrain, then both *æsir* in this poem make use of their paranormal abilities to ensure Óðinn's success in his quest. Before moving on to the analysis of the second act of the poem, we will first learn a little bit about the character Óðinn seeks to meet, and along with the god be ferried by the narrator to the home of the giant.

Object of the Intellect

Vafþrúðnir only appears as an active speaking character in the eddic poem *Vm* and thus our understanding of his character is based solely on this one poem. Verses from the poem, as stated above, are cited in *Gylfaginning*, and the name "Vafþrúðnir" appears in the *þulur*, or lists of names that are found in manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, appended to *Skáldskaparmál*. The following verse is found in the *þulur*, among a long list of names of giants:

> Kǫttr, Ǫsgrúi
> ok Allfarinn,
> Vindsvalr, Víparr

ok Vafþrúðnir,
Eldr, Aurgelmir,
Ægir, Rangbeinn,
Vindr, Víðblindi,
Vingnir, Leifi.[44]

The attestation of Vafþrúðnir's name here does not mean that he was known from any source other than the poem, as, for example, the name Aurgelmir is likewise only attested in *Vm* and the *þulur*. Furthermore, as Faulkes writes, "some of the *þulur* contain foreign words (Latin, French, Greek); this confirms their learned character and implies that they were mostly compiled in the twelfth century or later."[45] Thus the *þulur* most likely do not originate from a period that could be much earlier than the appearance of *Vm* or *Snorra Edda* in manuscripts, and the names "Vafþrúðnir" and "Aurgelmir" here most likely derive from a version of *Vm* that was extant when the *þulur* were composed.

The fact that Vafþrúðnir is not attested in other narratives leads Rudolf Simek to assert that the giant appears in *Vm* as the result of artistic license: "the giant Vafþrúðnir is a purely literary creation in order to present Odin with a sparring partner. Further proof that giants in Germanic heathendom could be considered wise—in contrast to medieval and later poetry where they are usually shown to be rather stupid—is the giantess Hyndla and also Mímir."[46] This is potentially the case, as there is no surviving evidence that suggests Vafþrúðnir was known outside of *Vm*, and the association of giants with wisdom is logical in the context of Old Norse mythology.[47] There are, however, many giants who appear in only one myth each, though they are more often in conflict with Þórr, and accordingly the mythical patterns required the giant to be defeated and killed. This helps explain why there are so many names for giants, as poets would have been continually inventing names for them as new stories were told about their defeat at the hands of the gods. As it stands, Vafþrúðnir is one of the only giants who speaks in the poetry of the R manuscript. Gerðr, a giantess, has eight stanzas of *ljóðaháttr* speech in *Skm*, Hymir has some verses in *Hym*, and Þrymr a few verses in *Þkv*. Otherwise, most of the speaking verses in the mythological poems of R are allotted to members of the *æsir*, the *völva* or prophetess in *Vsp*, and the dwarf Alvíss in *Alv*. *Vkv* has elves and humans speaking in the poem, but that poem eludes definition as either mythological or heroic, and there are neither gods nor giants in its story. Vafþrúðnir's role as a prominent speaker in a mythological poem in

R who is not a member of the *æsir* is therefore significant, reinforcing the potential threat that the giant poses to Óðinn. *Grottasöngr* (*Grt*), an eddic poem found in the R^2 and U manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, combines elements of myth, legend, and folktale and has two speaking giantesses, Fenja and Menja, but they are represented as slaves who by their own capacity become emancipated from a cruel human king, and thus no gods play a role in the narrative.

Frigg's vocal concern for Óðinn's proposed journey and her statement that she does not know of a more powerful giant demonstrates that indeed Vafþrúðnir must be very powerful, for he elicits concern among the *æsir*. The fact that Frigg, who is perhaps more familiar with Óðinn's abilities than any other, is concerned for his safety on the proposed journey suggests that from what she has heard of Vafþrúðnir, Óðinn may be no match for him. This would mean that Vafþrúðnir's reputation would have been mighty, for Óðinn is the most intellectually powerful god, and the *æsir* tend to get the better of the giants in the mythical present. From among the mythological poems of R a number of examples can be found where the *æsir* retain the upper hand in their dealings with other paranormal beings: Óðinn is able to take advantage of Gunnlöð to gain access to Suttungr's mead in *Háv* stanzas 104 through 110; Þórr is able to secure Hymir's cauldron for the *æsir* in *Hym*, retrieve his hammer from Þrymr in *Þkv*, and outwit Alvíss, the dwarf who wishes to marry his daughter, in *Alv*; and, furthermore, it is probable that Freyr secures the love or at least the submission of Gerðr, bringing her from Jötunheimr into the society of the *æsir* in *Skm*. Óðinn, as *Vm*'s audience can expect, appears confident and this suggests that he knows he will be able to outwit Vafþrúðnir. Even though the giant is undoubtedly quite powerful, it can be concluded from the frame dialogue between Óðinn and Frigg that he is not as powerful as Óðinn.

Most of what is known about the character of Vafþrúðnir is revealed through his dialogue with Óðinn in the main action of the poem, the wisdom dialogue. Vafþrúðnir permits Óðinn to enter his hall not knowing that the guest is disguised, and thus from the beginning of their interaction it is apparent that the giant does not possess any particular skill that allows him to see through deceit and disguise (or to foresee his own death at the end of the encounter). Óðinn outwits him from the outset, and this may be due to the god's great ability to disguise himself, rather than Vafþrúðnir's ignorance, but it also demonstrates that the guest has the upper hand over the host from the beginning. In stanza 9, furthermore,

Vafþrúðnir can be seen to be a gracious host, even though his threat to his guest's life in stanza 7 is far from gracious; but in stanza 9 he invites his guest further into the hall. This invitation is also a challenge, for the further into the hall the guest moves, the more difficult it will be in theory for him to leave. Even though a tactical maneuver, the invitation can be read as a welcoming gesture on the part of the host, or at least the appearance of one. Vafþrúðnir even offers his guest a seat and can be said to adhere to the guidelines Óðinn sets out in *Háv* stanzas 3 and 4 for what a guest is in need of upon arrival at an unfamiliar hall. After Vafþrúðnir asks four questions of his guest who goes by the name of Gagnráðr, the giant again invites the guest to take a seat, this time beside him. At this moment, full of confidence, Vafþrúðnir sets the stakes for the contest, which are life and death. Vafþrúðnir is confident during the early stages of his encounter with his guest, similar to how Óðinn is confident before departing from his home. With two contestants so confident at the beginning of their meeting, the events that follow are sure to be significant and reach a climax. What is more, the audience is able to foresee that there will undoubtedly be a reversal of fortune for Vafþrúðnir. In the end Vafþrúðnir will come to the realization that his fortunes are not what he thought they were.

Another characteristic revealed about Vafþrúðnir during his dialogue with Óðinn is his age. In stanza 34 Gagnráðr asks his opponent what his earliest memory is, and Vafþrúðnir replies in stanza 35 that before the creation of the earth he remembers when Bergelmir "var á lúðr um lagiðr". This piece of information indicates a very old age for Vafþrúðnir, as Bergelmir was the grandson of Aurgelmir-Ymir and was born before the creation of the earth, as is revealed in stanzas 28 and 29. The word *lúðr* has been interpreted either to mean cradle or coffin, but Machan interprets it to mean cradle, in accordance with an early memory of a birth.[48] Whether stanza 35 means that Vafþrúðnir remembers the birth or the death of Bergelmir is significant, for in either case it means that he was alive either at the end or the beginning of the lifetime of that very ancient giant. In *Gylfaginning* chapter 7, moreover, it is said that when Ymir was killed to make the earth and the heavens, all of the frost giants (*hrímþursar*) other than Bergelmir and his wife perished, and it is from them that the new race of frost giants descend. *Vm* stanza 35 is quoted in *Gylfaginning* chapter 7 to corroborate this myth, and this may indicate that either Vafþrúðnir was an exception to the many deaths that took place, if he was alive at Bergelmir's birth, or that he was a descendant of Bergelmir and remembers his death, which would mean that the birth of Vafþrúðnir occurs after

the creation of the world. Alternatively, *Vm* stanza 43 may suggest that Vafþrúðnir has lived and died many times, since he has been in the nine worlds below Hel. Regardless of whether Vafþrúðnir has died previously, the interpretation of the Bergelmir myth in *Gylfaginning* is influenced by the story of the great flood and Noah's ark from Genesis 7–8, and the piece of information that is important here is that Vafþrúðnir is confirmed as being very old. If he was present at the time of Bergelmir's birth he may be much older than Óðinn, for Bergelmir was, according to *Gylfaginning*, born before the death of Aurgelmir-Ymir, which was the primordial and creative act in which Óðinn and his brothers took part. While it is tempting to read *Vm* in light of *Gylfaginning*, the comparison of the two mythological sources does not necessarily lead to a tenable conclusion, especially as with this particular myth there are clear influences from Christianity in its *Gylfaginning* version.

In addition to his great knowledge of the past, Vafþrúðnir is also in possession of knowledge of future events. In the wisdom contest he is able to answer all of the questions about the future that Gagnráðr asks of him. The giant knows what will take place at Ragnarök and the circumstances surrounding the death of Óðinn. One question that hangs in the air when considering Vafþrúðnir's knowledge of the future is whether he knows that he will not be present at Ragnarök, and furthermore whether he realizes that his death is so near. To be able to see into the future, as Vafþrúðnir is able to, must indicate that he also knows about his own future, but this may not be the case. Óðinn, after all, has sought out Vafþrúðnir to learn about his own fate, or at least to confirm it.

Vafþrúðnir is ultimately a character who meets his end graciously. When Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir what Óðinn said into the ear of his dead son on the funeral pyre in stanza 54, Vafþrúðnir finally grasps that he has been participating in a contest with Óðinn himself. He admits that no one knows the answer to that question, and he understands he is doomed. His final words are that it is Óðinn who is the wisest of men, and he says this to his adversary in the final stanza of the poem: "þú ert æ vísastr vera" (you'll always be the wisest of beings). Vafþrúðnir accepts death honorably, having lost the contest to Óðinn in his own home. This grace is strikingly different from Heiðrekr's graceless reaction at the end of *Hgát*, even though the same narrative pattern is used in both stories. Vafþrúðnir is wise enough to recognize that he cannot change the course of events as they have played out in front of him, especially as he was himself a willing and enthusiastic participant in the contest that has led to his demise.

If Vafþrúðnir did know that he would meet his end in the contest with Óðinn, he successfully conceals this knowledge during the whole of the dialogue. Vafþrúðnir's dying act has been to profess the object of the intellect: mythological wisdom.

In the dialogue of the first scene of the poem, stanzas 1 through 4, Frigg is concerned for Óðinn's safety on his proposed journey as Vafþrúðnir is known to be powerful. Óðinn is relentless and, as demonstrated in other mythological sources, he is also very powerful and resourceful. The god insists that he will travel to see Vafþrúðnir and test his knowledge. From the outset Óðinn appears confident and this confidence is illustrative of how the god always seems to have the upper hand, until, that is, he meets Fenrir at Ragnarök. Óðinn is skilled in wisdom and warfare, and in the mythic present the gods tend to get the better of the giants.

Now that the cast of characters has been introduced and the action of *Vm* is underway, with the first and introductory scene complete, the narrator of the poem speaks in stanza 5, after which the first act is complete.

5 Fór þá Óðinn
at freista orðspeki
þess ins alsvinna jǫtuns;
at hǫllu hann kom
ok átti Íms faðir;
inn gekk Yggr þegar.

(Then Odin went to try the wisdom of the all-wise
giant; to the hall he came which Im's father owned;
Odin went inside.)[49]

The name Ímr also appears in the *þulur* as a giant name, and even though it might be unrelated, interestingly it appears in the weak form *Ími* in a runic inscription from the later thirteenth century on the Bergen rune stick B 252. The term in the context of the inscription apparently means "sooty," and it appears to be a part of a kitchen curse, intended to thwart someone's efforts in the kitchen.[50] Yggr is a well-known *heiti* for Óðinn, as noted above.[51] This stanza ties the two acts of the poem together: the journey that Óðinn announced to Frigg in the short first act is now underway and he has arrived at Vafþrúðnir's hall and is inside. The longer, more complex, and much more widely discussed second act is about to unfold.

Gunnell argues that stanza 5 is a verse insertion of material that is usually found in the form of a prose insertion in the other dialogic eddic

poems. He writes that "*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Hárbarðsljóð* are somewhat different to *Fáfnismál* and *Skírnismál* in that they are more limited in setting, and concentrate on simple, largely static two-man dialogue. Perhaps in consequence of this, the prose in both cases is fairly limited. Indeed, in *Vafþrúðnismál*, it is totally absent, although it might be argued that the narrative st. 5 is equivalent to the superfluous prose comments in the other poems [...] the information provided in the strophe is again based on the verse surrounding it."[52] Gunnell later adds to his argument, reinforcing that stanza 5 may be a superfluous addition that is not integral to the poem. While discussing the role of the first five stanzas of the poem, he argues that the narrative frame created by them is unnecessary, and that they might have been added at a date later than the original composition of *Vm*. He insists that "there can be little doubt that this is true with regard to the narrative st. 5 which tells of Óðinn's journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall. This is the only purely narrative *ljóðaháttr* strophe in existence, and like many of the prose passages in the Edda manuscripts, it appears to be totally superfluous. However, the first four strophes of the poem, in which Frigg tries to dissuade Óðinn from leaving, have so many direct links to the main body of the poem itself that they appear to have been an essential feature of the work from an early stage,"[53] if not from the beginning. This interpretation begs the question of why the poet or scribe who composed or copied *Vm*, or at least the version of it that has survived, chose to put this information in verse as opposed to prose. One possibility is that *Vm* is older than other dialogic poems that have this type of information in prose, and over the years the additional material became integrated into the metrical structure of the poem, resulting in the "narrative" (as opposed to "dramatic") stanza 5 becoming indispensable.

Machan points out that Óðinn's arrival at the hall of Vafþrúðnir has parallels in other Old Norse-Icelandic sources. He provides the following interpretation: "the poet here draws upon what might be called the ritual of entrance in Norse literature. That is, many diverse texts employ an episode wherein an unexpected and unknown guest arrives in a hall and provides the inhabitants with information or engages them in a question-and-answer exchange. The inhabitants, in turn, receive the guest almost ceremoniously and offer food and drink to him."[54] The main parallels are in *Nornagests þáttr*, another narrative where Óðinn appears as a disguised guest; *Gylfaginning*, as noted above, has King Gylfi of Sweden in disguise as Gangleri arriving at Ásgarðr; and even *Lok* has a ritual of entrance when Loki arrives at Ægir's hall.

Once Óðinn arrives at Vafþrúðnir's hall, the poem itself becomes more complicated. Leaving Frigg behind, Óðinn enters the hall of a hostile adversary of the gods, but it is quite likely that even when hearing the poem for the first time the audience trusts that Óðinn will succeed in his quest. This knowledge comes from knowledge of the larger mythological cycle, which has Óðinn perishing at Ragnarök. Considering all the information that is available to the audience of the poem, the first five stanzas in fact give away the basic plot structure of the whole, which will see Óðinn as the successful contestant in the wisdom contest he enters against Vafþrúðnir. What is not known at this point is how the god will go about enticing the giant to engage with him in the contest and what method he will use to gain the victory. In other words, we can now ask: how will Óðinn strike down Vafþrúðnir?

The analysis has now been brought up to the conclusion of act one of the drama of *Vm*. The form of the poem is divisible into a two-act play, with the second act much longer than the first. The first act is a domestic scene and may have represented the human quality of the *æsir* for a thirteenth-century Icelandic audience. As happens in marriages and partnerships, there can occasionally be disagreements, and in this case the male gets his way and embarks on a journey that he sees as important. Frigg chooses to support her husband, or is coerced into it, and the audience will now learn about why it was so important for Óðinn to embark on his quest, which, incidentally, is the same reason it is important to hear the poem: for knowledge of the cosmos.

Among the most interesting critical points relating to the first five stanzas is the relative importance that some scholars have attributed to them. To view *Vm* as a complete drama, as I seek to do, the domestic scene at its beginning is essential, for it brings the action down to earth and makes it relatable for a human audience. The "narrative" stanza 5 importantly serves as a stage direction or takes the place of the chorus, and the fact that it is presented in *ljóðaháttr* indicates that the narratorial voice has been worked into the form of the poem and may indicate that the poem is older than other eddic poems in which narratorial intervention is in the form of prose inserted between stanzas. Along with the Odinic figure, the audience now enters the hall of Vafþrúðnir.

NOTES

[1] As noted above, the Íslenzk fornrit edition divides *Vm* into fifty-six stanzas.

[2] Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, pp. 216–17.

[3] Lindow, "Eddic Poetry and Mythology," p. 130.

[4] Clunies Ross, "Voices in Eddic Poetry," pp. 220–21.

[5] On the marginal notations, Machan notes: "beginning with this stanza [18], the abbreviations *o.q* and *v.q.* accompany the dialogue in the margin of R." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 82.

[6] Gunnell, "Mælendamerkingar í handritum," pp. 7–29; Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, pp. 206–12. Gunnell has speculated on the intentions of scribes who have added marginal notes to manuscripts of eddic poetry and other medieval dramatic texts and, much like Clunies Ross, argues that it is to explicitly indicate a change in speaker and is strongly indicative of the dramatic character of the eddic poems in *ljóðaháttr*.

[7] Vries, "Om Eddaens Visdomsdigtning," pp. 14–15.

[8] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 145.

[9] Ibid., p. 147.

[10] Beginning here and continuing forward through the close of chapter six, all fifty-six stanzas of *Vm* are quoted in full, spaced alongside the analysis. At each instance the stanza number appears directly to the left of the stanza, like in editions of the poem. My intention is to juxtapose the critical interpretation of the poem with a standard version of the text (in this case the recent Íslenzk fornrit edition). All other quotations of eddic poetry are also taken from the Íslenzk fornrit edition unless otherwise indicated, but stanzas of eddic poetry not from *Vm* are not numbered in the same manner; rather, stanza numbers for poems other than *Vm* are given in the text introducing each quotation. Larrington (2014) has made a recent translation of eddic poetry into English (a revised version of her 1996 translation), and her translation accompanies the Íslenzk fornrit quotations in all instances where eddic poetry is quoted unless otherwise indicated. I occassionally suggest alternate translations for some words or lines in the notes.

[11] Geír T. Zoëga, *Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, pp. 330–32.

[12] Prominent texts in which Óðinn is a character are *Ynglinga saga*, *Snorra Edda*, and numerous eddic poems. Besides the Icelandic sources, a figure resembling Óðinn appears in Tacitus's *Germania* (98 CE) as Mercury, and then later also as Mercury in Paulus Diaconus (720–99), whereas, much later, Adam of Bremen (d. 1081) identified Óðinn with the classical god Mars. In *riddarasögur* Óðinn appears under pseudonyms, heiti, and kennings, and he also appears as a guest in several kings' sagas, including *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga*, both *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonn*ar by Oddr Snorrason and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, and *Böglunga saga*. Óðinn, or figures who strikingly resemble him, make interventions and appearances in legendary sagas such as *Skjöldunga saga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Völsunga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Gautreks saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*,

Örvar-Odds saga, and *Egils saga einhanda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. There are also references to Óðinn in skaldic poetry, and, of course, Saxo Grammaticus has much to say about Óðinn, the human king, in his *Gesta Danorum* (ca. 1200).

[13] *Ynglinga saga*, p. 13; *Saga of the Ynglings*, p. 8.

[14] There are other examples of dismembered heads which continue to speak, including these examples in relation to the story of Dionysius (i.e., St. Denis) supplied by David Williams: "the story of Dionysius combines two wonderous elements, that of the carrying of the severed head and that of the so-called *lingua palpitans*, the disembodied tongue that speaks. The events of decapitation and the speaking of the severed head are related to the subjects of death and life and to the nature of discourse and understanding, not only in the story of St Denis but in the many mythical uses of the severed head theme that precede the hagiographic version. Polycritos, an Etolian leader who died four days after his wedding, returns as a spirit to devour his new-born, hermaphroditic son, who is threatened by the crowd with death. The child's head, the only body part left by the father, begins to prophesy and specifies the locus of its own resting place. The head of the Welsh King Bran continues to converse with his companions after it is cut from his body, and, later ensconced in London, it exercises a magical resistance against invasion. The Scandinavian god Odin regularly consults the severed head of Mimer, a wiseman, which he has had encased in gold." *Deformed Discourse*, pp. 298–99.

[15] *Ynglinga saga*, p. 18; *Saga of the Ynglings*, p. 11.

[16] Ármann Jakobsson, "Óðinn as Mother," pp. 7–8.

[17] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1:221.

[18] Lassen, *Øjet og blindheden i norrøn litteratur og mytologi*, p. 97.

[19] About Óðinn's acquisition of paranormal or numinous knowledge, particularly in relation to the myth of Kvasir and Óðinn's theft of the mead of wisdom from Gunnlöð, see Schjødt, "Livsdrik og vidensdrik," p. 96.

[20] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 17; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, pp. 24–25.

[21] Lassen, *Øjet og blindheden i norrøn litteratur og mytologi*, p. 101.

[22] *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 14 line 4 provides a further example where Mímir's head is a source of information. For more information on Mímir, see McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 208. On the textual issues surrounding Mímir, Simpson argues that the "problems concerning Mímir are never likely to be resolved, but the parallels presented here do at least make it probable that the various passages concerning him are merely presenting different facets of a single, though complex, figure, and that the approaches to understanding his significance are not blocked by any irreconcilable contradictions." "Mímir," p. 53.

[23] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, pp. 4–5.

[24] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 164 and p. 222; Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, p. 292 and p. 414.

[25] Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Frigg og Freyja*, p. 131.

[26] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 153.

[27] *angan* appears in H and is interpolated into the R text by the Íslenzk fornrit editors to replace *angan týr* (favorite god). In both instances the reference is to Frigg's love, Óðinn. At several instances in the cited Íslenzk fornrit source text italics appear where the editors have made interpolations. I make every effort to address these textual issues in the notes.

[28] Some critics have argued that the phrase "Heima letja" could be emended to *Heima hvetja*. For discussion of this possible emendation, see Björn Magnússon Ólsen, "Til Vafþrúðnismál," p. 196; Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 53. About "Heima letja" as it stands, Machan argues that "the unusualness of the phrase results from Frigg's awareness of Óðinn's resolve to travel, which enables her to express her displeasure with the intended journey by *letia* alone." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 73. The emendation to "hvetja" is possible, but the temptation to change a text that already makes sense is illogical.

[29] About Frigg's concern for Vafþrúðnir's strength, Ruggerini writes that "the adjective *rammr*, here applied indirectly to the giant, has a particular force: it denotes a special kind of strength, not merely physical but also indicating magical power, which we may assume comes from the knowledge of the runes, from ritual drinks such as mead, and from the practice of prophecy or the enhancement of one's psychic powers." "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 146.

[30] Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Frigg og Freyja*, pp. 134–35.

[31] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 45; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 65.

[32] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 45; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 66. This is one example of Loki shape-shifting in order to achieve a goal. For a detailed list of instances where Loki performs such actions, see Ármann Jakobsson, "Loki og jötnarnir," pp. 35–37; and Bonnetain, *Der nordgermanische Gott Loki*, pp. 110–20.

[33] Dieterle, "Song of Baldr," p. 301.

[34] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, p. 59.

[35] About the prose introduction to *Grm*, Gunnell writes that it "is so complete in itself that it could have been drawn from a separate source in the form of an independent prose tale, or *þáttr*." *Origins of Drama*, p. 194.

[36] Ruggerini contends that "this first occurence in *Vm*. of the lines 'Much have I travelled, etc.' is thus important in that it marks out the speaker as Óðinn for the reader or audience beyond any shadow of doubt. Óðinn's re-use of the *helmingr* as the second refrain when the poem is approaching its climax represents a challenge to the giant, a chance for him to unmask the adversary he has before him. But he lacks the necessary sharpness of wit, fails the test, and goes on towards his defeat." "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 162.

[37] Ibid., p. 147.

[38] Läffler argues that in *Vm* stanza 4 line 2 "aptr" should be changed to 2 "fram" to keep to an alliteration pattern. "Om några underarter av Ljóðaháttr," pp. 1–124. Machan comments on this, stating that "in the *Edda*, whenever anaphora

is used in the first three lines of *ljóðaháttr*, there are two different sets of alliterating sounds in the two short lines." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 74. Salberger disagrees, however, and argues that rather than change "aptr" to "fram" in stanza 4 line 2, an insertion of "af" in front of "farir" in stanza 4 line 1 would take away the confusion caused by the anaphora. "Ett textproblem Vafþrúðnismál 4," p. 30.

[39] Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Frigg og Freyja*, p. 135.

[40] Sverdlov, "Linguistic and Metrical Aspects," pp. 69–70.

[41] *Ynglinga saga*, p. 12; *Saga of the Ynglings*, p. 7.

[42] Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Frigg og Freyja*, p. 171.

[43] Frigg appears in other sources, including works by Paulus Diaconus and Saxo Grammaticus, character depictions which when considered will likely change the image of her character as it has been depicted here.

[44] *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1:324. On the nature of the *þulur*, see Faulkes, introduction to *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, pp. xv–xviii; and E. A. Gurevich, "*Þulur* in *Skáldskaparmál*," pp. 35–52. About these lists, Clunies Ross writes the following: "the *þula* (pl. *þulur*) was a special form of versified list, which often used the *fornyrðislag* meter most commonly employed in Eddic poetry. *Þulur* contained collections of poetic *heiti* for the major subjects of skaldic verse, such as gods, men, ships and weapons, ordered in strophic form. The evolution of *þulur* can probably be attributed to the need of skaldic poets to have access to versified *aides-mémoire* which functioned like rhyming dictionaries." *Skáldskaparmál*, p. 81. If poets were drawing from *þulur* regularly, then Vafþrúðnir may have appeared in skaldic poems that do not survive in manuscripts.

[45] Faulkes, introduction to *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. xvii.

[46] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 344.

[47] Traditonally giants in many literary and folkloric traditions have been protrayed as evil, representing the other or the anti-human. See Stephens, *Giants in Those Days*, p. 66. On the connection between the giants and wisdom, and in particular Vafþrúðnir and wisdom, see Schulz, *Riesen*, p. 61.

[48] Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, pp. 89–90.

[49] An alternate translation of the last line of stanza 5 might read: "Odin went inside at once."

[50] McKinnell, Simek, and Düwel, *Runes, Magic, and Religion*, p. 133.

[51] *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1: 325. For a discussion of the name *Yggr*, see Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, pp. 183–85.

[52] Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, p. 232.

[53] Ibid., p. 277.

[54] Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, pp. 37–38.

Chapter Four

The Guest Waits on the Floor

THE SECOND ACT OF *Vm* covers the remainder of the poem and is divisible into three scenes. Act two scene one takes place with Óðinn on the floor of the giant's hall, and during both the second and third scenes of act two Óðinn sits near Vafþrúðnir on the giant's bench. The marker of the change from act two scene two to act two scene three is when Óðinn switches from numbering his questions to using the refrain "Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaðak, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin" to introduce his final six questions. Óðinn does make a change in his refrain with his tenth numbered question, but as he continues to number his questions through the twelfth question, I interpret the change in scene to be most appropriately placed after the numbering is concluded. In total the god asks the giant eighteen questions. The main characters in the poem are all introduced in act one, but the audience has still not heard directly from Vafþrúðnir, the eponymous character. The second act is structurally more intricate than the first act, and the first scene of act two is composed of Óðinn's entrance into the hall and Vafþrúðnir's vetting of his guest to determine if Gagnráðr (as Óðinn presents himself) is wise enough to in turn question the giant himself. In whole, the first scene of the second act is composed of stanzas 6 through 19.

Sigurður Nordal (1886–1974) made the following statement about *Vm*: "the *framework* of *Vafþrúðnismál* is an independent tale and in no way fused with the matter of the poem. Whatever speakers there might be could exchange parts, and there is no difference between Óðinn's manner of speech and Vafþrúðnir's."[1] Rather than agree, I argue that on the contrary the framework of the poem and its content are in fact fused together and indeed inseparable. Alison Finlay has voiced the opinion that most contemporary scholars dissent from Sigurður Nordal's viewpoint on *Vm*.[2]

The division of the poem into two acts, with the second act having three scenes, is not a simple division. Observation of the poem's structure suggests that there is a connection between the form and the content

of *Vm*. The structure of the poem elegantly mirrors both its content and the mythological cycle of Old Norse mythology. Sigurður Nordal adds to his above statement, however, focusing on what he sees as discordance between form and content in the poem: "the *organisation of content* and the cohesion of *Vafþrúðnismál* show this even better. Óðinn's first question (st. 20) is, it is true, about the origin of heaven and earth, and his next to last (st. 52), about his fall in Ragnarök, but in st. 17 there is talk of the battlefield of Surtr and the gods, in st. 48, right in the middle of other material, of the norns, and so on. The poem is a jumble of odd fragments of erudition without any proper organisation, and no attempt is made to trace the causal connection of events."[3] As the following chapters intend to illustrate, there is a consistent and coherent logic to the presentation of the poem's contents.

Sigurður Nordal's critique of *Vm* may have been influenced by his deep admiration for the structure and content of *Vsp*, and how the form and the content work together almost flawlessly in that poem. Rather than seeking to find what does work well in *Vm*, he may be commenting on how *Vm* does not repeat what *Vsp* has already done. The fact that the two poems to a large degree share similar content invites such a comparison, but *Vm* is a dramatic poem whereas *Vsp* is a narrative poem in the form of a monologue, albeit with dramatic features, and both should be judged independently in terms of how their form and content are related. A monologue surely calls for a different interpretation than a drama. The present interpretation argues that when *Vm* is interpreted as a dramatic poem in which the actors play out the larger context of the mythological cosmos on the small stage in Vafþrúðnir's hall, the content is directly related to the poem's form and should be considered a construction that is far from "a jumble of odd fragments." Furthermore, responding to Sigurður Nordal's assertion that the reference to the battlefield of Surtr and the gods in stanza 17 is out of place, I argue that it is in fact in an appropriate place, for in Vafþrúðnir's vetting of his guest during act two scene one, the scene focused on in the present chapter, the giant is tracing a cosmological framework for questions that Óðinn will follow when he in turn questions Vafþrúðnir in act two scene two. The questions that Vafþrúðnir asks of his guest are expanded upon and they in fact lay the foundation for the wisdom contest proper that begins at stanza 20 when Gagnráðr assumes the role of questioner. In the same manner that the poem as a whole mirrors the cosmological cycle, the two question-and-answer sequences mirror one another. More accurately, Gagnráðr's question sequence is based

upon the framework established by Vafþrúðnir, and thus the poet has constructed the shape of the poem intentionally.

The temporal framework for the action of *Vm* within the larger context of the mythological cycle is that of a series of events (here divided into two acts) that have their own place in mythical time, occurring sometime after the death of Baldr, as indicated in stanzas 54 and 55 where reference to that event as having taken place in the past is made, but before the beginning of Ragnarök, as there are references to events that will transpire in the future at Ragnarök or after it in stanzas 44 through 53. The framework and the mythological content of the poem are not independent from one another, and, what is more, the content and form of the poem are directly tied to the configured mythological cycle as a whole. *Vm* is a central mythological event in relation to Ragnarök: it confirms what has already been said in *Vsp*—that Óðinn will perish at the great battle between the gods and giants—and introduces more mythological information about the impending battle, even though there are no actions in the poem that lead to Ragnarök itself, although the death of Vafþrúðnir prepares Óðinn for his own death, and Óðinn's confirmation of his fate may hasten time. The poem reflects upon one of the major events that leads to Ragnarök, Baldr's death, and foresees the events of Ragnarök itself and its aftermath, all the while reinforcing that in the mythological present the gods continue to maintain the upper hand in their antagonistic relationship with the giants. In the myth represented in *Vm* Óðinn is able to enter the giant's home and beat his opponent at his own game.

If Sigurður Nordal's interpretation of the poem as a disjointed narrative were to be taken as an accurate interpretation, then the structure of the poem must be viewed as merely a vehicle for its content, which is the cosmological knowledge transmitted during the dialogue between the two main characters, and not as an independently significant story or mythical representation that was told on its own. The framework, however, is significant on its own: during the entire dialogue between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, the whole second act of the poem, Óðinn conceals his identity up until his final question, which is something that Vafþrúðnir cannot do, and thus the psychological dynamic between the two speakers is active and a certain textual irony is invoked. This psychological dimension alone reinforces that the poem is a significant story in and of itself and that its form and content are fused together significantly. In this poem Óðinn is on a quest to gain knowledge about the past, the present, and the future, a future in which he dies. What is most puzzling, or even troubling,

here is that Óðinn is on a quest to confirm his own death. Knowledge of one's own death is not the most appealing information to learn about, but Óðinn seeks it out.

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1899–1984) found much to praise in *Vm*, and he cites the giant names Bergelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Aurgelmir as three examples of mythological tidbits that are not known from any other source. Even so, he still found something lacking in the overall artistry of the poem that he asserts *Grm* does not lack.[4] But just because a poem may be less elegant, does this lack make it less valuable artistically? Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, like Sigurður Nordal, although praising the wealth of information provided by the text, does not find it to be a particularly valuable work of art but more of an important storehouse of mythological information. The lack he detects is of interest, for with the poem's minimalist presentation there is an increased room for emphasis on all of the dramatic actions that are made by the characters, especially if the poem is considered in its entirety with both acts seen as equally important to the narrative. There is no doubt that this poem holds an important place in the catalogue of texts that involve Óðinn, and the primacy that Vafþrúðnir holds among mythological giants is also obvious, as he is given the most extensive speaking role of any giant in the mythological poetry of the R manuscript.

Óðinn conceals his identity on a number of occasions in different sources. In *Vm*, *Grm*, and *Bdr* the god arrives at his respective destinations in disguise, and in all three of these poems his true identity is revealed near to the end of the poem. It can be stated outright that disguise is an Odinic motif, and, what is more, he remains in disguise for the whole of *Hrbl*, choosing not to unmask himself, but rather to make a fool out of his son Þórr who is unable to see the true identity of his adversary, his own father. In *Hrbl* stanza 10, Óðinn even goes so far as to state he rarely conceals his name, which must be a joke between the speaker and the audience, for he regularly conceals his name. Óðinn's use of disguise is similar to his use of paranormal means in the acquisition of knowledge. The god often relies on the paranormal elements at his disposal, such as Mímir's head, along with his own cunning to gain wisdom. Combined with the motif of disguise, his command over the arts of trickery becomes more obvious when parallels are drawn with other mythological texts. Such an assemblage demonstrates how he is an inherently untrustworthy character who is highly skilled in magic and the arts of disguise. Even though he can be so cunning, he is often portrayed in a favorable light in the mythological narratives. It is difficult to not have some sympathy for Vafþrúðnir in *Vm*,

an old being who will lose his life as a result of Óðinn's intrusion into his home, but this sympathy may be a modern interpretation. In the world view of the mythological texts the gods are the protectors of Miðgarðr and the giants are the hostile others who inhabit Útgarðr or Jötunheimr, a place on the periphery. Vafþrúðnir is no innocent bystander, ignorant as he may be to the nature of his guest's visit. The giant invites the despair he eventually meets. But we should still ask: is he just defending himself?

Óðinn uses deceit in *Vm* to gain entrance into the hall of his host and this deception helps him to control the encounter. The god holds the advantage over his opponent who thinks that he is dealing with a mere traveler and not with Óðinn of the *æsir*. Vafþrúðnir is unaware of his guest's true identity until it is too late, yet members of the audience are well aware, and are in fact most likely hoping for Óðinn's success. The domestic scene in Ásgarðr that opened up the poem in act one encourages the audience to sympathize with the *æsir* for it is a scene that humans can more easily relate to. It is easier for humans to understand Óðinn the husband than this very old giant, for even though they are paranormal beings, the gods are closer to humans than their counterparts the giants.

Óðinn now draws Vafþrúðnir into his trap, which results in a wager of life and death being made. Following the theory of Ricoeur, the close and contextual reading continues by focusing on temporal units within the narrative, which in the case of a dramatic narrative are acts and scenes. The first scene of act two, *Vm* stanzas 6 through 10, can be regarded as a traditional type of scene which might be called "challenging the new arrival." This narrative pattern is also found in *Skm* stanzas 11 through 13, the opening of *Hervararkviða*, and it is perhaps identifiable in *Fjöl* stanzas 1 through 6, which incidentally also includes a half-stanza of narrative in *ljóðaháttr*. As we proceed I will continue to draw the related narratives together using Ricoeur's concept of configuration.

Psychological Games

As he did in the first act with Frigg, Óðinn again initiates the dialogue in the second act with Vafþrúðnir. This is to be expected, as it is Óðinn who is in the role of the guest and has come to call on the giant. As has been transmitted by the narrator in stanza 5, Óðinn promptly enters the hall of Ímr's father when he arrives there, and once on the inside of the hall, Óðinn speaks directly to the giant.

Óðinn kvað:
6 "Heill þú nú, Vafþrúðnir!
nú em ek í hǫll kominn
á þik sjálfan sjá;
hitt vil ek fyrst vita,
ef þú fróðr sér
eða alsviðr, jǫtunn."

(Greetings, Vafthrudnir! Now I have come into the hall to see you in person; this I want to know first, whether you are wise or very wise, giant.)

When Óðinn tells Vafþrúðnir that he will know if he is *fróðr* or *alsviðr*, wise or very wise, he is telling the giant that he intends to know exactly how wise Vafþrúðnir is, and it can be said that this is the initial challenge.[5] Óðinn has quickly taken control of the situation by stating what he intends to do on his visit, and his opening words provoke the giant to engage with him, which Vafþrúðnir will eventually agree to do. Ruggerini argues that in relation to normal patterns of entrance, where a stranger requests admission and hospitality, here "the traditional roles appear to be reversed: the stranger who has just arrived from outside dares—without even having declared who he is—to begin by putting an unusual, almost rude question to the person who has yet to decide whether or not to allow him hospitality."[6] This tactic is intentional and gives Óðinn the upper hand by irritating his host, drawing forth curiosity as to who has come to him and entered his home in such an aggressive manner. It must be a fool, Vafþrúðnir might conclude, for the giant is seduced into the wisdom contest that leads to his death. He would presumably only enter into such a contest if he thought himself to have the upper hand, or so one might think. Thus, by entering in such an aggressive manner Óðinn has placed pressure on Vafþrúðnir, effectively cornering him. Finnur Jónsson explains that Óðinn immediately bursts out with his errand in a superior tone, intentionally so, so that the giant is provoked to compete with the intruder; in that way Óðinn wins the upper hand and demonstrates to the audience his superior intelligence, whereas the giant is left looking a bit stupid as he is tricked by his guest, though he is known to be knowledgeable.[7] It is the first trick that Óðinn plays on Vafþrúðnir, and his sense of superiority reflected in his use of a superior tone will later be echoed in his victory. From the outset Óðinn fully controls the situation and by demonstrating his confidence from the beginning of the interaction, as the

audience has already seen him do with his wife Frigg in act one, Óðinn plays a psychological trick on the giant at the beginning of their interaction. By doing so he gains the upper hand.

In response Vafþrúðnir asks who his visitor is, as his foremost concern must be to determine the identity of his guest, something he will not be able to do until it is too late. Such a concern on the part of the host is understandable, for not only has he been provoked and issued a challenge, but such provocation has come from someone he has not met previously, and who is of an unknown identity. The aggressive nature of the guest's entrance must be startling in the mind of the giant, but he chooses to counter the guest's entrance with an aggression of his own. Vafþrúðnir speaks back to the guest who has entered his hall without an invitation with the express purpose of finding out how wise he is.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
7 "Hvat er þat manna
er í mínum sal
verpumk orði á?
Út þú né komir
órum hǫllum frá,
nema þú inn snotrari sér."

(What man is this who addresses me in hostile fashion
in my hall? May you not come out of our halls alive
unless you should be the wiser one.)

Vafþrúðnir implicitly accepts the challenge made by his guest with the threat that the challenger will not leave the hall alive if he is not as wise as his host. It is as if Vafþrúðnir throws aside any concern about the danger of letting this guest into his home and instead meets the guest's outward confidence with his own robustness. Feeling challenged, the host replicates the aggressive nature of Óðinn's entrance and, most importantly, introduces the matter of life and death into the situation. Vafþrúðnir must feel confident that he is wiser than whoever has come and called at his door, although the giant has not yet put his own life on the line. Ruggerini contends that "these points and the following development of the scene show, I believe, that Óðinn's opening insult was deliberate. The use of this tactic has allowed him to achieve the aim of irritating the giant and rousing his curiosity, to the point of inducing him to accept the idea of measuring himself in a wisdom contest."[8]

In the next stanza Óðinn provides a name to pacify Vafþrúðnir, calling himself Gagnráðr, and adds that he is in need of drink and hospitality. The guest's tone has become notably less aggressive, less superior and more needy, indicating that he has relented somewhat from his contentious entrance, at least on the surface.

Óðinn kvað:
8 "Gagnráðr ek heiti,
nú emk af gǫngu kominn
þyrstr til þinna sala;
laðar þurfi
hefi ek lengi farit
ok þinna andfanga, jǫtunn."

(Gagnrad I am called; now I have come walking,
thirsty to your hall; in need of hospitality and of your
welcome, I have journeyed long, giant.)

Óðinn has thus craftily concealed his identity by using a *heiti* that refers to one of his many names, and he also feigns tiredness. Bertil Ejder (1916–2005) argues that Óðinn goes as far as to pretend to be in fear of the giant, stating he is merely a tired wanderer who will happily submit to being questioned first.[9] At this point in the scene both characters are playing psychological games; Vafþrúðnir threatening death, and Óðinn supplying a false identity while craftily manipulating his opponent.

The name Gagnráðr is ambiguous, which may be Óðinn's intention. It can be interpreted as either "The One Who Counsels Victory," which is what Bugge forwards, "Den som raader for Seier,"[10] or the name could mean "The Victorious One," which would accord with Óðinn's role as the most powerful member of the *æsir*, the chooser of the slain, and the ruler of valkyries, wherein he distributes victory and defeat. The ambiguity of the *heiti* is heightened because an alternative form of the *heiti* for Óðinn appears in manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*; among the *þulur* there is the slightly different name "Gangráðr" in a list of *heiti* for Óðinn.[11] The preservation of the two forms suggests that either they are two different *heiti* for Óðinn or that the form as it appears in R is a mistake, as has been argued by Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson in both editions of the *Lexicon Poeticum*, by R. C. Boer, and by Finnur Jónsson.[12] If the form of the *heiti* that is preserved in the *þulur* is the correct interpretation, then the name Gangráðr may mean "The One Who Counsels Travel"

("som rader for gang") or "The Wanderer" ("vandrer"), as Finnur Jónsson has forwarded.[13] This interpretation is consistent with Óðinn's portrayal of himself as a tired traveler in this scene. In sum, on the name Óðinn supplies to Vafþrúðnir, there are two possible interpretations which, for matters of simplification, can be considered as, firstly, "The One Who Counsels Victory" or "The Victorious One," and, secondly, "The One Who Counsels Travel" or "The Wanderer." The present study, while giving due consideration to both possibilities, will use the name Gagnráðr (thus: "The One Who Counsels Victory" or "The Victorious One"), as that is the form which appears in R, and since the A manuscript version of *Vm* begins at stanza 20 line 2 it cannot help us to clarify the problem, for stanza 8 does not appear in that text. Both possible names conceal the speaker's true identity and fit the role of the Odinic character within the poem. If Vafþrúðnir is very wise he may recognize the *heiti*, particularly Gagnráðr, and in this sense stanza 8 is Óðinn's first test of the breadth of the giant's knowledge. The possibility that Óðinn is testing the breadth of Vafþrúðnir's knowledge by supplying a *heiti* might be called into question if the alternative Gangráðr is the accepted form, for then Óðinn might be reinforcing that he is a tired traveler, although the term does appear in the *þulur* as a *heiti* for the god.

If Gagnráðr is accepted as the true form of the name then a further alternative meaning is possible. Gagnráðr can be broken down into the adverbial prefix "gagn-", meaning "counter-,"[14] and the noun "ráð", meaning "counsel," which would result in a *heiti* for Óðinn meaning "The One Who Is Against Counsel," or "The Disputant."[15] A further meaning could even be "The One Who Counsels to the Contrary." "The Disputant" has been accepted as a likely interpretation of the *heiti*, and as with the other possibilities it is consistent with Óðinn's role in *Vm*, where he is at first against the counsel that Frigg gives him in act one, even though he asked for it in stanza 1, and then in the second act he clearly plays the role of a disputant with Vafþrúðnir, getting into a contest with him that results in death.[16] The name Gagnráðr may also mean "The One Who Gives Good Counsel," and in sum the ambiguity remains.[17] Regardless of the meaning of the *heiti*, Óðinn deceives his host upon arrival, but it would be dishonorable for him to tell an outright lie to Vafþrúðnir, so the name he goes under, his alias, must match his role in some way.

In stanza 8 Gagnráðr portrays himself as a tired and thirsty traveler who is in need of hospitality, matching the description of what a traveler may be in need of in *Háv* stanzas 3 and 4. After his somewhat aggressive

entrance in stanza 6 and the giant's equally aggressive reaction in stanza 7, the guest backs off a bit, asking for his host's grace. Finnur Jónsson notes Gagnráðr's change in attitude, explaining that after Óðinn has achieved what he wanted—that is, an audience with the giant—he now seems to be frightened and in need of food and drink, but the giant does not offer him refreshments.[18] Óðinn did not exactly lie to Vafþrúðnir by providing a *heiti* in place of his actual name, but he also did not tell him the complete truth, and this deception is of great assistance to the god in getting closer to securing the contest in knowledge that is the objective of his quest. It is important that Óðinn has allowed his host to feel that he is in control of the situation by feigning tiredness and thirst. At this point the encounter is a game of psychological positioning and wit. Óðinn provides Vafþrúðnir with a false sense of security and has in no way stopped calculating exactly how to engage his opponent.[19]

Not fearing Gagnráðr, Vafþrúðnir invites the stranger into his hall, asking him why he has not yet entered further. This makes it clear to the audience that Óðinn's tactics have had their intended effect by placing Vafþrúðnir off his guard. The giant states that they will determine who is wiser, and in so doing he grants Óðinn his sought-after contest of wits.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
9 "Hví þú þá, Gagnráðr,
mælisk af gólfi fyr?
Farðú í sess í sal!
Þá skal freista
hvárr fleira viti,
gestr eða inn gamli þulr."

(Why, Gagnrad, do you speak thus from the floor?
Come take a seat in the hall! Then we shall test which
one knows more, the guest or the old sage.)

Vafþrúðnir is stepping into the trap Óðinn has set for him. The giant appears confident, and he must be, for he is being hospitable to the stranger as a good host should, or he is at least providing a parody of being a good host while remaining suspicious of the guest he is inviting further into his home. The giant's invitation to the traveler to come further into the hall reconfirms that he accepts the guest's challenge. With this action Vafþrúðnir states more solidly that there will be a contest than he did in stanza 7. Before he had just threatened that the guest will not leave unless

he is the wiser of the two. Vafþrúðnir refers to himself in stanza 9 line 6 as "inn gamli þulr" (the wise man), indicating that he thinks highly of himself and by implication perhaps less so of his guest. While thinking himself to be wise, the giant is at the same time unaware of the true identity of his guest, and Óðinn's initial hint in providing a *heiti* that may be an initial test of the giant's knowledge has gone right over Vafþrúðnir's head. Vafþrúðnir must think he is wiser or else he would not be entering into dangerous intellectual territory by inviting his adversary further into his hall.

In stanza 10 Gagnráðr's tone is even more humble than it was in stanza 8, further drawing Vafþrúðnir into his trap. Heeding advice given in *Háv* stanza 19 that a man should be sparing of speech, Gagnráðr answers Vafþrúðnir's invitation to advance into the hall.

Óðinn kvað:
"Óauðigr maðr,
er til auðigs kømr,
mæli þarft eða þegi;
ofrmælgi mikil
hygg ek at illa geti
hveim er við kaldrifjaðan kømr."

(The poor man who comes to the wealthy one should
speak when needful or be silent; to be too talkative
I think will bring bad results when one comes to the
cold-ribbed man.)

In this stanza Gagnráðr reassures Vafþrúðnir of his submissiveness and inferiority as a stranger in the home of his host. This tactic places Vafþrúðnir in the role of the rich person being visited by the poor traveler. Answering the question that Vafþrúðnir posed in stanza 9 lines 1 and 2 as to why he has not entered further into the hall, Gagnráðr states that it is because as a guest he must remain humble.[20] The parallel with *Háv* stanza 19 sets up another irony, for what Gagnráðr says is true in principle, yet is irrelevant to the scenario in *Vm* as Óðinn is neither literally nor figuratively poor in relation to Vafþrúðnir. This tactic is therefore another way Óðinn deceives Vafþrúðnir without actually lying to him. Again, as in stanza 8, Gagnráðr's humbleness is feigned, for, recalling the confidence with which Óðinn prepared to leave Ásgarðr in stanza 3, the god's thoughts are not actually humble. Rather, he is the aggressor and knows

himself to be the superior of the two. The audience views the scene from the perspective of Óðinn, the protagonist, and can see that his psychological tactics are working on the seemingly ignorant Vafþrúðnir.

It is now time for Gagnráðr to be tested by his host. Having brought himself humbly to the feet of the giant after the outburst he made in stanza 6 that led to the desired result of getting the giant to act aggressively, Gagnráðr now submits himself to being questioned. The adjective "kaldrifjaðr", literally "cold-ribbed," from the final line of stanza 10 is placed there strategically by Gagnráðr, and it may be a subtle indication that he finds Vafþrúðnir to be malicious, cunning, or even hostile.[21] The ribs are close to the heart and if one has cold ribs it is likely that they also have a cold heart. Even though the audience sympathizes with the *æsir*, we might ask: who is more cold-hearted, the guest who intrudes on the old host in order to kill him, or the host who is forced to defend himself?

Preliminaries

Once Óðinn has gained entry into the hall of the giant, Vafþrúðnir proceeds to ask a series of four questions, and for each question Gagnráðr provides a suitable answer. It is in this sequence that Vafþrúðnir must determine if his opponent is wise enough to merit a full contest of wits. Stanzas 11 through 18 act as a preliminary contest to the primary contest that follows, setting up oppositions not only between the god and the giant, but also between light and darkness and "our side" (the *æsir*/gods) and "the enemy" (the *jötnar*/giants).[22] The subject matter that will be dealt with when Gagnráðr turns to questioning Vafþrúðnir is introduced in this preliminary round, but it is developed in much more depth later.

Wasting no time, Vafþrúðnir puts forward his first question to Gagnráðr, a cosmological question. What has up to this point been a poem that is mostly dramatic in nature now also becomes encyclopedic, and the exposition of encyclopedic knowledge that begins here reveals some of what medieval Icelanders inherited from their pre-Christian ancestors, elements of pre-Christian belief that have survived in Old Norse poetry.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
11 "Segðu mér, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sá hestr heitir

er hverjan dregr
dag *of* dróttmǫgu."

(Tell me, Gagnrad, since on the hall-floor you want to try your skill, what that horse is called who draws every day over mankind.)

The refrain Vafþrúðnir uses to introduce each of his four questions confirms that his guest Gagnráðr remains on the floor of the hall, "á gólfi", as he was in stanza 9, and thus has not come any further into the hall. He has chosen to keep his distance from the giant and remain in the role of the humble guest, and Óðinn's placement on the floor from stanza 6 through stanza 19 is the primary marker for act two scene one. The first question Vafþrúðnir has for his guest concerns the name of the horse that draws day to mankind. This topic directly concerns the passage of time and the movement of the cosmos. Gagnráðr's first response demonstrates his knowledge to his host.

Óðinn kvað:
12 "Skinfaxi heitir,
er inn skíra dregr
dag um dróttmǫgu;
hesta beztr
þykkir hann með
*H*reiðgotum,
ey lýsir mǫn af mari."

(Shining-mane, the shining one is called who draws day over mankind; the best of horses he is held to be among the Hreid-Goths, always that horse's mane gleams.)

The day is drawn by the horse Skinfaxi, a horse who the "*H*reiðgotar" ("*H*reiðgotum" in the poem) find to be the finest of horses. The term appears in R as Reiðgotum, but an initial letter "H" is required for alliteration. Thus it can refer either to the "Reiðgoths" specifically, for example, the Danes, or to the "Austgoths," but the term most likely refers to humans in general, or good riders.[23] It is no surprise that the best horse is the one that is said to bring the day to the people of the world.

The most basic unit of time, what we now refer to as the twenty-four-hour period, is made up of two parts: the day and the night. Hastrup

explains that "in Iceland the basic temporal unit was the *day*. The day was defined by the visible movements of the sun, and this was directly acknowledged in the name given to this particular unit of physical time; *sólarhringr*, 'sun-ring' or 'sun-course.'"[24] In the mythological context the sun would still be traveling during the night, and the night would likewise travel during the day. Logically, Vafþrúðnir's next question for Gagnráðr is to name the horse that draws night from the east.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
13 "Segðu þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sá jór heitir
er austan dregr
nótt *of* nýt regin."

(Tell me, Gagnrad, since on the hall-floor you want to try your skill, what that horse is called who from the east draws night to the beneficent Powers.)

The night, like the day, is also drawn by a horse, referred to here as a "jór", a poetic term for horse. The indication that the two halves of the "day," that is, day and night, are drawn respectively to men, as was the case with the sun, and to the gods, as is the case with the night, shows there is a strong connection between gods and men in the mythological world view. Humans and gods live together in Miðgarðr, with the gods having their special enclave in Ásgarðr, and they share the same sky. Knowledge of what draws the sun to men seems to serve as a prerequisite for knowledge of what draws the night to the gods, and this connection confirms that in fact humans and gods live together. It may be the case that the gods are actually human, albeit paranormal or supernatural humans. This is certainly the case in mythological narratives in which the gods are euhemerized. Gagnráðr handily replies to the question.

Óðinn kvað:
14 "Hrímfaxi heitir
er hverja dregr
nótt *of* nýt regin;
méldropa fellir
hann morgin hvern,
þaðan kømr dǫgg um dala."

> (Frost-mane he is called, who draws every night to the beneficent Powers; foam from his bit he lets fall every morning; from there dew comes to the valleys.)

Gagnráðr not only supplies the name of the horse that draws the day to the gods, Hrímfaxi, but he provides additional information as well. By providing this extra information, more than seems to be required by Vafþrúðnir, Gagnráðr is demonstrating that he is in fact wise enough to converse with the giant.

Gagnráðr's two answers share their subject matter with Hár's response to a question made by Gangleri in *Gylfaginning*. There it is said that a giant named Nörfi or Narfi had a daughter named Nótt who was married to Naglfari and then to Dellingr. With Dellingr, who was a member of the *æsir*, they had a son named Dagr. It is then said that Alföðr took Nótt and Dagr and gave them two horses and two chariots and placed them in the sky to ride around the earth every twenty-four hours. It is said Nótt rides first with Hrímfaxi and Dagr follows with Skinfaxi. This same story about the origins of the night and the day and the two horses that pull them through the sky is recounted in more detail in Vafþrúðnir's answers to Gagnráðr later in the poem, but the corresponding details in *Gylfaginning* demonstrate that the myth was most likely common knowledge in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when these works were being composed in manuscripts. As in *Vsp*, and for that matter Genesis 1:4–5, it is significant that the mythological information addressed first in cosmogonic narratives concerns the origins of time. Without the separation of light and darkness, and thus the alternating periods of light and darkness, time would not pass. In cosmological narratives it is primary to account for the origins of the mechanisms for the passing of time. Vafþrúðnir's questions and Gagnráðr's answers in stanzas 11 through 14 introduce themes that are among Gagnráðr's first questions to Vafþrúðnir. The mechanisms of time presented in the cosmology of the poem are horses. Gurevich claims that "few factors in a culture express the essential nature of its world picture so clearly as its way of reckoning time: for this has a determining influence on the way people behave, the way they think, the rhythm of their lives and the relationships between them and things."[25] It may be argued further that the use of horses in the mythical representation of the mechanisms of time demonstrates a high regard for horses in thirteenth-century Iceland, unless it is a remnant from the classical tradition.

The names of these horses are found in verse only in *Vm* and in the *þulur*, which might suggest they are relatively recent inventions. Most other "hrím-" compounds in verse are associated with the giants, such as Hrímgerðr from *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* (*HHv*), Hrímgrímnir (*Skm*), and Hrímnir (*Skm* and *Hdl*), not to mention the *hrímþursar* as a group (i.e., the frost giants).[26] The strong association between the giants and the mechanisms of cosmic time suggests that even though they are hostile to the gods (and humans), they are necessary for the balance of the cosmos, as darkness is to light. Accordingly, the opposition of "skin-" ("sheen" or "shining") and "hrím-" ("rime" or "frost") further develops the opposition of light and darkness which plays out in this poem as it does in the mythological cycle on the whole.

After the two questions concerning origins, Vafþrúðnir then questions his guest about a geographical landmark that is significant to the sociopolitical orientation of the mythological cosmos. This marks a movement in subject matter of the giant's questions from the past toward the present, and what is most striking is that the question is the first one in the poem that addresses the relationship between the gods and the giants.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
"Segðu þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sú á heitir
er deilir með jǫtna sonum
grund ok með goðum."

(Tell me, Gagnrad, since on the hall-floor you want to
try your skill, what that river is called which divides
the land between the sons of giants and the gods.)

The boundary between the gods and the giants is physical, political, and personal. It is also the central theme of *Vm*, a narrative in which a god and a giant meet in direct confrontation. An irony of the poem is that Vafþrúðnir is unaware that he is in fact speaking with Óðinn for most of the dialogue. The division between the two groups of paranormal beings is so important that it is embedded in the geography of the earth. This is a primary example of how the framework of the poem, which has Óðinn traveling to Vafþrúðnir and engaging him in dialogue that leads to the giant's death, is in fact connected to its content. The conflict that is being played

out in the two-act drama of *Vm* is part of the same division that in the mythological cosmos is represented by a physical boundary. In the end this division leads to the destruction of Ragnarök. Gagnráðr replies to his host.

Óðinn kvað:
16 "Ífing heitir á
er deilir með jǫtna sonum
grund ok með goðum;
opin renna
hon skal um aldrdaga,
verðrat íss á á."

(Ifing the river is called, which divides the land
between the sons of giants and the gods; freely it will
flow through all time, ice never forms on the river.)

The river Ífing is only mentioned in *Vm* and Machan maintains that "since this is the only occurrence of this word, the initial *í* is uncertain, as, indeed, is the meaning of the name itself," for the meaning may be, Machan continues, "Yew River" or "The Violent One." He concludes that "the river that is free of ice and ever-flowing is an archetypal symbol of life."[27] It is notable as a piece of information because it denotes a physical boundary between the gods and the giants, serving as a metaphorical frontline, as well as a physical one, between the hostile groups. The giants live on the periphery of the mythological cosmos, most often in the East or the North, so Ífing may run between Miðgarðr and one of these two cardinal directions. Furthermore, this concept may fit with the actual winter experience of Icelanders in that the river never freezes over and is difficult or impossible to cross for that reason, remaining a boundary that is hard to pass and would be dangerous. When the two opposing sides meet at Ragnarök and destroy one another, the world itself is destroyed, and presumably the river Ífing with it. The world will be reborn, but there is no mention of the giants in the new world, and the ideal supposition that the younger generation will not repeat the actions of their ancestors may not require such a river to exist. If the modern world is anything to judge by, there is little hope that such a frontier between antagonistic groups will not arise again, though a hopeful outlook at any time would imagine a world without boundaries.

Vafþrúðnir's final question for his guest turns to the future. Having already asked about the past and the present, the giant challenges his guest

to tell him the name of the field where the gods and the giants will meet. This question naturally follows the previous one. In the present it is a river that divides the two groups, but in the future they will meet on a field that is not divided, but on which they meet in battle. This particular question, which was pointed to by Sigurður Nordal as being out of context within the structure of the poem, is directly in context when compared to the three questions which precede it. This preliminary round of the wisdom contest introduces the structure of the main wisdom contest that begins at stanza 20, and it is thus logically situated in relation to what is still yet to come. The first two questions of the preliminary round are concerned with origins, the third question with the contemporary geography of the mythological world, and here the fourth question refers to the geography of the future.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
17 "Segðu þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sá vǫllr heitir
er finnask vígi at
Surtr ok in svásu goð."

(Tell me, Gagnrad, since on the hall-floor you want to
try your skill, what that plain is called where in battle
Surt and the good-tempered gods will meet.)

Vafþrúðnir asks his guest for a very specific kind of knowledge: knowledge of the future. It is one thing to be in possession of knowledge of things past and present, but something else altogether to know what will occur in times that are still yet to come. With this final question Vafþrúðnir confirms his guest is up to the challenge of entering a wisdom contest. What is most interesting is that as Gagnráðr is able to answer Vafþrúðnir's question successfully, it may seem strange that the giant does not show any concern that his opponent is wise enough to see into the future and deliver a prophecy. This is also the first of several hints Óðinn offers his host as to who the visitor may be, not counting the *heiti* he gave as his name in stanza 8, which raises the tension in the poem. As before when he did not clue into the *heiti*, Vafþrúðnir ignores this clue.

Beginning at stanza 18 in the R manuscript, marginal markings introduce the speakers with alternating statements of *Óðinn qvað* (*o.q.*)

and *Vafþrúðnir qvað* (*v.q.*). On these marginal notations, Gunnell writes that "while the speakers certainly do appear to have been regularly named in the sections of the manuscripts containing these poems, the naming was obviously not regarded as being an integral part of the poems themselves."[28] Rather than being integral to the texts themselves, Gunnell argues that the marginal notations, while they were recorded into the manuscripts at the same time as the rest of the text,[29] indicate that "the naming of speakers was seen by the redactor or scribe as something completely extraneous to the text of the poems themselves,"[30] and, most importantly, that "the notation is primarily a silent *reader's* aid (or perhaps, more interestingly, meant for guidance in a spoken recitation), placed there by the scribe or redactor in the form of an 'editorial' comment that was felt to be necessary."[31] Gunnell's argument is that poems such as *Vm* were originally performed, and that when they were recorded into manuscript form they required the marginal notes to guide the reader: "in short, they must have regarded the dialogic poems as a kind of popular vernacular drama, designed for performance by more than one speaker."[32] An enigma that remains, however, is why the marginal notations in *Vm* begin at stanza 18 and continue through the remainder of the poem, alongside each stanza of speech, but are not present in the margins alongside the first seventeen stanzas in R, which are, apart from stanza 5, no less dialogic in structure. It may be that the exemplar from which the scribes of R and A copied did not contain marginal notations prior to stanza 18, or that it is the main wisdom contest that begins at stanza 20 that was the focus for performance and the hand that made the marginal notations did not see the need to add any notation before stanza 18, firmly establishing the order of speech. A further possibility is that it was merely an oversight, or possibly it is the work of a later scribe (but not that of R or A) who had this idea during the process of copying.

Gagnráðr replies to Vafþrúðnir's final question without difficulty, and with his answer the guest satisfies his host's curiosity as to his breadth of knowledge. Gagnráðr answers Vafþrúðnir's question by referring to the fateful field where Surtr and the *æsir* will meet in the future.

Óðinn kvað:
18 "Vígríðr heitir vǫllr
er finnask vígi at
Surtr ok in svásu goð;
hundrað rasta

> hann er á hverjan veg,
> sá er þeim vǫllr vitaðr."
>
> (Vigrid the plain is called, where in battle Surt and the good-tempered gods will meet; a hundred leagues it is in each direction; that is the field ordained for them.)

Vafþruðnir's interest in the future battlefield and Gagnráðr's sharp response to the question signals that both contestants are very wise, possessing knowledge not only of the past and the present, but also of the future. Stanza 18 is quoted in *Gylfaginning* chapter 51, where Ragnarök is described in detail. Óðinn's words from *Vm* close that chapter in the form of a stanza quotation.[33]

The four questions posed by Vafþrúðnir concern the past, the present, and the future, and they form a prelude to the wisdom contest proper that is about to get underway. The origins of day and night, the physical front between the worlds of the gods and the giants, and the theme of Ragnarök have all been introduced, and they are all expanded upon later in the contest. On the first round of the wisdom contest, in which Vafþrúðnir poses questions to Gagnráðr, Ruggerini points out that in relation to time these four questions and their answers foreshadow what is to come, "from hinting at an event in the remote past which has consequences and perpetuates itself in the present (the creation of day and night), we pass on to a situation which concerns the present of the gods and guarantees their security (the setting of a boundary between their realm and that of their enemies), and finally come to the mention of a place whose purpose will become clear only in the distant future (because it is there that the gods will fight at the end of the world)."[34] In the drama unfolding in *Vm*, stories from the history of the mythological cosmos are presented as bits of wisdom within the larger narrative of the poem. It is through the question-and-answer scheme between the two opponents that the mythological cycle is narrated, embedded in the drama, and the bits of mythological knowledge revealed in the dialogue configure with the mythological cycle just as the poem does. This is similar to how the *völva* recounts and accounts for the past, the present, and the future of the mythic cosmos when Óðinn comes to her in *Vsp*. The form and content are connected in both poems, and in the case of *Vm* the task may have been especially challenging for the poet(s), whether heathen or Christian, as the form is that of a dialogue rather than a monologue. If there is any indication of who may win the contest, in terms of rhetorical

skill the two opponents appear equally matched, but in stanzas 16 and 18 Óðinn demonstrates particular poetical skill in his answers, reassuring the giant of his ability to converse with such a wise man. Vafþrúðnir may not be as wise as he thinks he is. In his next stanza of speech the giant puts everything on the line.

The Wager

Vm is a contest in knowledge between a god and a giant that has as its stakes the head of the loser. It is the wager of life or death that gives the poem its suspense. Frigg objects to Óðinn's proposed journey in the first act of the poem precisely because she fears her husband may lose his life in the contest, although the audience should already know Óðinn is successful in quests such as this one. In addition to the presentation of much knowledge that pertains to the mythological past, the mythological present, and the mythological future, a deadly match is taking place between the two contestants in the poem which is itself a prelude to Ragnarök, when the two opposing sides of the mythological cosmos will destroy one another. Vafþrúðnir's hall is the small stage on which the larger battle between the gods and the giants is rehearsed by two representatives. The final struggle between these cosmic forces, as has just been announced, will end at Vígríðr.

Stanza 19 concludes act two scene one of the drama, and this is where Vafþrúðnir acknowledges his guest's wisdom and takes the major step of wagering their heads on the outcome of the wisdom contest. This stanza also serves the important function of marking the transition to the main part of the wisdom contest, which is the core of the poem, and the exchange of roles by the two contestants. The giant is confident in his ability to succeed in the contest, hence the wager, and he is also impressed enough by Gagnráðr's answers that he will submit to being questioned himself. With the wager Vafþrúðnir brings about his own imminent death sentence.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
19 "Fróðr ertu nú, gestr,
far þú á bekk jǫtuns,
ok mælumk í sessi saman;
hǫfði veðja
vit skulum hǫllu í,
gestr, um geðspeki."

> (Wise you are, guest, come to the giant's bench, and
> we will speak together in the seat; we shall wager our
> heads in the hall, guest, on our wisdom.)

Vafþrúðnir considers his invitation for Gagnráðr to come and sit on the giant's bench to be an honor for the guest, but he does not realize he is inviting a dangerous god further into his home. By bringing his guest further inside, Vafþrúðnir likely thinks that he is entrapping his guest, whereas in reality he is inviting his enemy to come closer. Vafþrúðnir then states the stakes of the contest that they will undertake, their heads, and in so doing puts his own life on the line, whereas in stanza 7 Vafþrúðnir only confirmed that his guest would lose his life if he turned out to be less wise. The movement of Óðinn further into the hall is confirmed, for it can be assumed that a condition of the main part of the contest will be that he takes up the seat that is offered to him on the bench, for this brings the two contestants onto a level playing field. It is this movement further into the hall and onto the bench that marks the transition from act two scene one to act two scene two. This transition is further enforced by the appearance of the word "Capitulum" (i.e., chapter) in red ink in the manuscript after the word "geðspeki".[35]

Looking back on the preliminary round of the wisdom contest, the following can be said, in sum: Gagnráðr has been asked a series of four questions; two of the questions concerned the origins of the cosmos, the questions about the horses Skinfaxi and Hrímfaxi; one question concerned the geography of the great divide between gods and giants; and the final question concerned the site of the battle at Ragnarök. With his answers to these four questions the disguised guest has qualified himself for a competition with Vafþrúðnir, and from the point of view of the audience, the question that presents itself most obviously is the following: why does Vafþrúðnir bring his guest further into his hall, endangering himself so greatly? Either Vafþrúðnir is confident in his ability to defeat his guest in the wisdom contest that will follow, or Vafþrúðnir knows he has reached his time to die and chooses to demonstrate his great wisdom on his death bed. In my opinion the former is more likely than the latter.

Óðinn craftily lures the giant into a trap in the giant's own home by getting his naïve host to think he is the one leading his guest Gagnráðr into a defeat. The god has breached the giant's defenses without revealing his true identity and without letting the giant know he has in fact made the breach. The name Gagnráðr alludes to the guest's true identity

(unless the alternative Gangráðr is accepted, which would reinforce the disguise) and Gagnráðr has in fact proven himself very wise by answering Vafþrúðnir's four questions with great poetic skill. Óðinn was able to do all of this efficiently, and now he is about to commence his questioning of Vafþrúðnir. To be the one asking the questions is the reason why the god left Ásgarðr in the first place.

The struggle between the gods and the giants that permeates the mythological narratives of the R and A manuscripts and *Snorra Edda* is about to play out on the small stage. The confrontation between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir is only a small part of the grand narrative, although it is acutely symbolic. During the next two chapters I closely analyze the wisdom contest between these two paranormal beings. The question-and-answer exchanges lead to the demise of the giant Vafþrúðnir. On the way to his death, of which it appears he has no foreknowledge, although that is not known for sure, Vafþrúðnir reveals to his guest and to the audience a great deal of important mythological knowledge that pertains to the past, the present, and the future.

By closely analyzing the episodes that make up the plot of the poem, here referred to as acts and scenes, the present critique pulls the action of the poem apart and opens it up for new interpretations. The methodology is based on Ricoeur's configurational model in two important ways. The episodes of the narrative of *Vm* configure into a whole, and in that sense after the close and contextual reading of the poem is complete, the episodes will be brought together to find meaning on the three levels introduced at the beginning: the formal, historical, and critical. Ricoeur's theory is also active in my configuration of multiple mythical narratives into a whole mythology. This impulse is often resisted in the Old Norse field, but unnecessarily so if there is a critical awareness of the process. While being wary of the fallacy of adding these narratives together, narratives that may in fact represent divergent traditions, I argue it is important to compare these narratives alongside one another.

NOTES

[1] Sigurður Nordal, "Three Essays on *Völuspá*," pp. 103–4.

[2] Finlay, "Risking One's Head," pp. 91–92. Finlay's focus is to "investigate the ways in which *Vafþrúðnismál* provides a mythic model for the *hǫfuðlausn* story told by Egill Skalla-Grímsson and other poets. The question-and-answer format of the eddic poem, with both participants interrogated and measuring their wits is of

course rather unlike the forced production of a poem at the bidding of an offended ruler, but the association of Óðinn with poetry as well as with wisdom sketches a parallel between the god's powers and the life-saving verses the poets are able to produce" (p. 92). The most prominent parallel, of course, is the wagering of heads, and in relation to *Vm*, she writes: "Óðinn's achievement is not so much the acquisition of information, for he must already know the answers to the questions he poses," but rather to establish himself as a worthy opponent to Vafþrúðnir (p. 106).

[3] Sigurður Nordal, "Three Essays on *Völuspá*," p. 104.

[4] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld*, p. 276.

[5] On the preposition *eða* in this case, Machan relays that: "*eþa*, Detter and Heinzel note (*Sæmundar Edda*, 155), is not disjunctive; Óðinn is not so much asking Vafþrúðnir if he is wise or very wise but rather 'just how wise are you,' and in doing so Óðinn in effect issues a challenge, which the giant quickly accepts." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 75.

[6] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 166.

[7] Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 54.

[8] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 167.

[9] Ejder, "Eddadikten Vafþrúðnismál," pp. 7–8.

[10] Bugge, introduction to *Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 66.

[11] *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1:337.

[12] Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, p. 167; and Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., p. 168; Boer, *Die Edda mit historisch-kritischem Commentar*, 2:52; Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 54.

[13] Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 54.

[14] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *Icelandic-English Dictionary*, p. 187.

[15] Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 77.

[16] McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, p. 89; Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 167.

[17] On the issue of the meaning of Gagnráðr, see Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:357.

[18] Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 54.

[19] On this tactic, Machan argues that "in order to get what he desires (entrance to Vafþrúðnir's hall) Óðinn assumes the posture of a tired, hungry, and almost frightened guest. If slightly less hostile, however, Óðinn is still calculating: in the ritual of entrance, the host must accede to the guest's request, so that Óðinn is here guaranteeing himself entrance further in to the hall and thus moving inexorably towards the wisdom contest." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 77.

[20] *Háv* stanza 19 line 3 reads "mæli þarft eða þegi" (let him say what's necessary or be silent), further reinforcing the connection between the two poems.

[21] Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson note that the adjective "kaldrifjaðr" literally means "med kolde ribben" (with cold ribs), but can also carry the connotation of "fjendsk, ondskabsfuld" (hostile, malicious). *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., p. 333. Sprenger has also written about this adjective in the context of

Vm, forwarding that the appearance of the word in the poem points to a late date for the poem, a time no earlier than the beginning of the thirteenth century. "Vafþrúðnismál 10,3: Der Kaltgerippte," p. 188. McKinnell argues against Sprenger, stating that the emotional sense that she identifies in the adjective "kaldrifjaðr" can be seen in earlier examples of skaldic poetry, for example in instances of "brjóst" and "hjarta". See his *Both One and Many*, p. 88.

[22] Kragerud, "De mytologiske spørsmål i Fåvnesmål," pp. 32–33.

[23] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:358; Gísli Sigurðsson adds: "*Reiðgotar*: menn frá Reiðgotalandi, hér líklega menn almennt" ("Reiðgoths": men from the land of the "Reiðgoths," here likely men in general). Introduction to *Eddukvæði*, p. 58; Machan notes further that "in almost every modern edition, *Reiðgotom* and *reka* are emended to, respectively, *Hreiðgotom* and *vreka*, their historical forms." "Editing of Eddic Poetry," p. 219. For more on the *Hreiðgotar*, see Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 80. The italicized *H* is added to the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of the text to reflect the historical form and also to assist the reader with alliteration.

[24] Hastrup, *Culture and History*, p. 19.

[25] A. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, p. 94.

[26] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 159.

[27] Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 81.

[28] Gunnell, *Origins of Drama*, p. 208.

[29] Ibid., p. 208.

[30] Ibid., p. 210.

[31] Ibid., p. 212.

[32] Ibid., p. 329.

[33] The size of Vígríðr is also interesting in relation to time, for it is measured in terms of the length of a "röst". About this type of unit for measurement, A. Gurevich explains that "the length of a journey is measured in time (the number of days spent at sea or travelling on dry land). There was no need for anything more precise. It occurred to no one to imagine a journey between two points, in abstraction from a traveller making that journey. When measurements of distance are mentioned, it turns out that these measurements do not correspond to any sort of fixed or standard units. Thus, *röst*, which is sometimes translated as 'mile,' really indicates the distance between two halting places (cf. English 'rest')." *Categories of Medieval Culture*, p. 102.

[34] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 170.

[35] In the editions by Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál*), Gísli Sigurðsson (*Eddukvæði*), and Bugge (*Norræn fornkvæði*) the "Capitulum" that is found in the R manuscript is included in the text, whereas the editions by Finnur Jónsson (*De Gamle Eddadigte*) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði*), for example, do not include it. The latter two editions continue immediately to stanza 20, although in the Íslenzk fornrit edition the "Capitulum" is mentioned in the notes. The "Capitulum" is significant, for it is a physical mark on the manuscript which suggests the compiler thought the break in the scene important.

Chapter Five

Sitting on the Giant's Bench

THE FOLLOWING QUOTE FROM Eliade illustrates for us how the cosmogonic act and its representation in narratives might have belonged to the collective consciousness of Icelanders during the settlement period. The stories that they may have carried with them from Scandinavia were invigorated with the transformation of the barren Iceland into an island that was settled completely in under a century. Creation was not only a part of their mythological heritage, but a part of their history:

> Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of creation. When the Scandinavian colonists took possession of Iceland, *Landnáma*, and began to cultivate it, they regarded this act neither as an original undertaking nor as human and profane work. Their enterprise was for them only the repetition of a primordial act: the transformation of chaos into cosmos by the divine act of Creation. By cultivating the desert soil, they in fact repeated the act of the gods, who organized chaos by giving it forms and norms.[1]

Eliade here reminds us that for medieval Icelanders the settlement of the island and the establishment of their commonwealth was in the recent past for those in the thirteenth century. The representation of that formative period is one of the central topics for the saga literature of the period, a period during which the commonwealth was fading under the ever-growing presence of the Norwegian monarchy. The settlement marked a new beginning for the settlers. If Eliade's idea were investigated further, however, medieval textual evidence might support a stronger connection between *Landnámabók* and Genesis than between the settlement and pre-Christian myth.

In *Vm* there is also a new beginning after the "Capitulum," from which point forward in the narrative Vafþrúðnir will be questioned by his guest Gagnráðr. The two characters are now sitting on the bench in Vafþrúðnir's hall and the questions begin with the distant past. The text

of *Vm* that is found in the A manuscript begins at stanza 20 line 2 (at the word "œði"), and thus the core of the wisdom contest, during which Óðinn questions Vafþrúðnir, is intact in that manuscript.[2] This section, which makes up the bulk of the poem (roughly two-thirds of its verses), is also the section that often receives the greatest deal of critical attention.[3] Up to this point, Óðinn has not given away his true identity or seemed overly wise, which leads Vafþrúðnir to feel confident that he will be victorious. The final two scenes of the drama are the most suspenseful, which is natural as the build-up of the dialogue leads toward a climax near the conclusion. But the rising action results from what the first nineteen stanzas have set in motion, which is a dramatic interaction between two paranormal beings who are talking about the very events that will lead to the destruction of the cosmos. The action represents a microcosmic version of the main events of the mythological cycle. It can be anticipated that there will be a reversal of fortune for Vafþrúðnir in the denouement and resolution of the plot just as there is for the giants in the cosmic cycle, all of whom perish at Ragnarök. Vafþrúðnir is in for a great surprise, and the audience watches the fall of the old, wise, and powerful giant.

Origins

Eliade's concept of repetition further reminds the reader that each time a drama is performed, its contents are recreated. In this way, a medieval poet reciting *Vm* or another eddic poem was bringing that poem and its characters to life for that audience. Similarly, for a modern audience, the myth continues to be relevant the more it is performed and studied. On the eternal tendencies of creation, Eliade writes that, "in fact, in certain archaic cosmogonies the world was given existence through the sacrifice of a primordial monster, symbolizing chaos (Tiamat), or through that of a cosmic giant (Ymir, Pan-Ku, Purusa). To assure the reality and the enduringness of a construction, there is a repetition of the divine act of perfect construction: the Creation of the worlds and of man."[4] When the story of the cosmogony is told, as it is in *Vm*, it is a repetition of the creative act or at least an acknowledgment of its repetition. Gagnráðr begins his questioning of Vafþrúðnir by turning to origins, as Vafþrúðnir did with his first two questions for Gagnráðr in stanzas 11 and 13, but here the subject reaches all the way back to the origins of the world. Furthermore, during his turn as interrogator Vafþrúðnir asked only about names, which shows less wisdom than Óðinn's questions about origins.

The very first question that Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir is about the creation of the earth and the sky, and in so doing he addresses the very origins of the cosmos. Vafþrúðnir knows very little about his opponent. He knows that his name is Gagnráðr and that he has tested him on some mythological knowledge, and he has deemed him to be sufficiently wise to enter the wisdom contest. Óðinn, on the other hand, may know more about his opponent than he did upon his arrival at the hall, for in the four questions that Vafþrúðnir asked of his guest, Óðinn was introduced to Vafþrúðnir's knowledge base, not necessarily in its entirety but at least its contours.

Óðinn kvað:
"Segðu þat it eina,
ef þitt œði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan jǫrð um kom
eða upphiminn
fyrst, inn fróði jǫtunn."

(Tell me this one thing if your mind is sufficient and
you, Vafthrudnir, know, from where the earth came or
the sky above, first, O wise giant.)

Gagnráðr has numbered his question, something Vafþrúðnir did not do, stating "Segðu þat it eina", indicating that he intends to ask more questions. He will in fact number his first twelve questions. The phrase "ef þitt œði dugir" is also interesting, for it is a challenge that is direct, and may even suggest that the one asking the questions has some doubt as to whether his contestant is up to the task of the competition, if his mind has enough wisdom.[5] Vafþrúðnir did not include a numbered phrase in his questions in the preliminary round of the contest, but rather included the phrase "alls þú á gólfi vill / þíns um freista frama", which indicates that it is the guest who is seeking to compete against the host. Gagnráðr appears more confident and indeed is an aggressive guest. Schjødt argues that in Óðinn's questions, which begin here, there is a clear indication of a chronological ordering of time, beginning with creation, then dealing with the elements in the world, and ending with events after Ragnarök.[6] Step by step the question-and-answer sequence draws the audience through a history of the cosmos.

Vafþrúðnir is aware of what took place in the long-distant past, and his answers to his guest's questions provide the cosmological information for both Gagnráðr and the audience.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
21 "Ór Ymis holdi
var jǫrð um skǫpuð
en ór beinum bjǫrg,
himinn ór hausi
ins hrímkalda jǫtuns,
en ór sveita sjór."

(From Ymir's flesh the earth was shaped, and the mountains from his bones; the sky from the skull of the frost-cold giant, and the sea from his blood.)

Like Gagnráðr in the preliminary round of questioning in act two scene one, Vafþrúðnir has provided more information than was asked of him, adding details about the origins of the rocks and the sea above and beyond what was asked about the earth and the sky. The creation myth involving Ymir is found in other sources that provide a parallel to it, and add to what is given here in the giant's response. In *Grm* stanza 40 the same information is provided in similar phrases, although in a different order, and in stanza 41 of that poem additional information is provided beyond what Vafþrúðnir provides. The *Grm* account adds that from his brows Miðgarðr was formed and from his brain clouds were made for the sky.

Although the same information is given, in *Grm* it is Óðinn who provides it, whereas in *Vm* it is Óðinn who questions the giant about it and Vafþrúðnir who supplies the information with his answer. Óðinn must have known the answer before asking the question, or else he would be unable to evaluate the correctness of the answer, an essential aspect of a wisdom contest. The similarity in content between the two poems suggests that they developed together—as they are found together in both principal vellum manuscripts of eddic poetry—and it is not only the similar information that is provided in the two poems, but also the fact that both take Óðinn as the favored protagonist in his encounters with his adversaries, whether giant or human. The two poems form a pair of Óðinn-voyage poems. Larrington writes that "since the two poems are clearly biased in favor of Óðinn, placing the audience on his side in the wisdom-performances he stages, the ideology of Vafþrúðnismál and Grímnismál is

Æsir-centred."[7] The wisdom performance that Óðinn stages in *Vm* is the contest itself, particularly stanzas 20 through 55, the main contest that occurs after he has gained entrance to the hall and been vetted by Vafþrúðnir. In *Grm* the god dictates a monologue of cosmological knowledge to the human king Geirrøðr, who has taken him captive, and the king's son. The respective portraits of the cosmogony presented in each of the two poems match one another closely, and the fact that in both poems the cosmological information is presented in the form of a wisdom performance supplies strong evidence that the two poems support one another. The connection of the poems is reflected in their content and juxtaposition in the manuscript tradition, and further buttressed by the extensive use of both poems in *Gylfaginning*.[8]

In *Gylfaginning* chapter 8, Hár, yet another representation of Óðinn of the *æsir*, recounts the same cosmogonic myth. The trio of Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði host Gangleri, who asks about many things that concern the mythical cosmos during his visit to Ásgarðr. One of his questions is about the actions of the sons of Bor, who are, according to *Gylfaginning*, Óðinn and his brothers Vili and Vé, during the creation period when the earth and the sky were being formed. Hár says that the sons of Bor took Ymir and moved him into the middle of Ginnungagap and from his body they made the world. From his blood the sea and the lakes were made, from his flesh the earth was fashioned, and mountain cliffs were made from his bones. Beyond that they made stones and gravel from his teeth, molars, and the bones from his body that were broken. At this point Jafnhár adds that the blood that gushed freely from his wounds was used to make the sea, and by fashioning the sea around the periphery they belted and fastened the earth. The sea is so large, it is added, that most men would think it impossible to cross. The creation story in *Gylfaginning* continues, but it is evident that the same cosmogonic myth is accounted for in all three of these texts in similar versions (i.e., in *Vm*, *Grm*, and *Gylfaginning*), and it can be conjectured that it was a reliable thirteenth-century account of the pre-Christian myth of the cosmogonic act. Of particular interest is that in *Gylfaginning* it is said that the sons of Bor took Ymir and created the earth, the sea, and the sky with his body. Reading the mythic narratives together as a whole mythology leads us to gather that in *Vm* Gagnráðr (i.e., Óðinn) is asking Vafþrúðnir to tell him something that he would be well aware of, not just because he as the questioner possesses knowledge of it from his extensive storehouse of wisdom, but because he, as Óðinn, would know of it from personal experience. It also confirms that Óðinn is in fact very

old, for if he was an active member in the cosmogonic act, he would have existed when there was nothing more than the Ginnungagap. The creation story is also interesting because in it Óðinn and his brothers kill their maternal relative Ymir. As Óðinn, Vili, and Vé are the sons of Bor, Bor was the son of Búri, the first áss (i.e., god) who was created by Auðhumla, the primeval cow, who licked him out of salt. It is said that Búri married Bestla, who was the daughter of the giant Bölþorn. Lindow suggests that it is tempting to think of Bölþorn as one of the original offspring of Ymir, though there is no explicit evidence for this in surviving sources.[9]

In *Vsp* stanzas 3 and 4 the creation myth is given in a slightly different version than the version that is related in *Vm*, *Grm*, and *Gylfaginning*. In those stanzas of *fornyrðislag* the *völva* recounts how it was a long time ago when Ymir made his home (in R and H), back when there was no sand, sea, or cooling waves. There was no earth to be found, she recalls, no sky or grass, but only a gulf. Then she says that Bur's sons, like in the account from *Gylfaginning*, made the earth, Miðgarðr specifically. Then the sun shone from the south and the ground grew with the leek's green growth. In the R version of *Vsp*, in stanza 3 it is said that Ymir *byggði*, made his home, and then in stanza 4 that the sons of Bur "bjǫðum um yppðu" (H has the similar "bjǫðum of yppðu"), brought up the lands, to create Miðgarðr, but it should be noted that in the *Snorra Edda* version of *Vsp* stanza 3 (the oldest version), it reads "þat er ekki var" and Ymir is not mentioned. This may suggest influence from Genesis 1 (i.e., the void before the divine creation), but because the Ymir myth was so well known in the late heathen period, it became incorporated by some oral performers. In the *Vsp* version there is thus only the recognition of Ymir's existence at the time when there was nothing but the Ginnungagap and that Bur's sons were the ones who were involved in the creation. It is not specifically said that it was from Ymir's flesh, bones, and blood that the world was created. As a result, the account given in *Vsp* (both the R and H versions provide similar accounts) does not contradict the accounts from the other three sources, but it does not corroborate them either. It does appear, however, that all four of these sources which account for the Norse mythological cosmogony (*Vsp*, *Vm*, *Grm*, and *Gylfaginning*) essentially relate the same creation myth: the giant Ymir existed before Bor's sons performed the cosmogonic act. Three of the sources indicate that it was from his body that the earth was created, a sacrifice made by the gods for the good of the world and its current and future inhabitants.[10] The fact that the cosmogonic myth survives in four sources, even though somewhat divergently,

demonstrates the importance of the creation myth to the people of medieval Iceland. The creation myth was important to the medieval Icelanders perhaps because it represents the placing of the elements in order. Gurevich explains that "time is as real and tangible as the whole world. Consequently it is possible to order and to divide time. This the gods did in creating the world—they made the earth and the heaven, they divided time and established its count."[11] With the creation of the earth and the sky the gods created the space in which the instruments that are used to measure time could be placed. The context in *Vm* adds an element of tension not present in other accounts of the Ymir myth. As a descendant of Ymir, Vafþrúðnir would be bound to take vengeance on Óðinn if he realized the true identity of his visitor. When he does discover who his visitor is, the time for vengeance has passed. The giants will get their vengeance at Ragnarök.

The second question Gagnráðr asks his host is about the origins of the moon and the sun. This is a natural progression in subject matter, considering that the first question he posed was about the creation of the earth, and it is from the earth that the heavens are seen.

Óðinn kvað:
22 "Segðu þat annat,
ef þitt œði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan máni um kom
svá at ferr menn yfir,
eða sól it sama."

(Tell me this second thing if your mind is sufficient
and you, Vafthrudnir, know, from where the moon
came, so that it journeys over men, and likewise the
sun.)

This second question is numbered like the first one, which stresses that the questions will continue to be numbered and that they are perhaps being asked in an order that is significant. As will become more apparent as the questions continue, the ordering mirrors the chronology of the mythological past, the mythological present, and the mythological future as we know it from the configured sources. There is, in other words, an internal logic to the presentation of the subject matter: it is chronological. In response to Gagnráðr's second question the giant is once again clear.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
23 "Mundilfœri heitir,
hann er Mána faðir
ok svá Sólar it sama;
himin hverfa
þau skulu hverjan dag
ǫldum at ártali."

(Mundilfaeri he is called, the father of Moon and likewise of Sun; they must circle through the sky, every day to count the years for men.)

Gagnráðr's question and Vafþrúðnir's answer are related to the first two questions that Vafþrúðnir asks of his guest during his vetting process in act two scene one. Gagnráðr's questions for Vafþrúðnir demand the giant reveal more than was revealed previously, but they continue to build on the cosmogonic theme, and the putting in place of the instruments by which time is measured. As an editor of the poem Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál*) interprets the name of the father of máni and sól to be "Mundilfœri", as do Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði*) in their edition; however, in other editions the spelling is different.[12] Finnur Jónsson (*De Gamle Eddadigte*) interprets the name as "Mundilfari" and Sveinnbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson suggest the name means "The One Who Moves According To Fixed Times."[13] Mundilfœri's children, máni and sól (moon and sun), would thus, like their father, move according to fixed times, as they are the two main celestial bodies that routinely move across the sky. After the creation of the earth, the instruments by which time is kept track of come into existence.

Clive Tolley argues that Mundilfœri may represent the image of the cosmic mill, an axis with a handle that turns the heavens. This interpretation is based on the meaning of the word "hverfa" in stanza 23 line 4, which Tolley argues needs to be interpreted as "turn," and the possible dual meaning of "mund" as "time" and "hand."[14] Tolley cites Cleasby and Vigfusson, who define Mundilfœri as follows: "Mundil-föri, the name of a giant, the father of the Sun and the Moon; akin to möndull, referring to *the veering round* or *revolution* of the heavens,"[15] and a "möndull", in turn, can be defined as the handle of a mill.[16] Tolley does not envision Mundilfœri as a giant, however, but as a device or machine. This etymology leads him to conclude that it is possible that "the name Mundilfœri has been designed to signify the mill-like device that turns the heavens by

means of a 'handle,'"[17] which as a result is thus responsible for the passage of time. It is the turning of the handle which results in the rotation of the heavens, and by observing the movement of the celestial bodies time is kept track of. If Tolley's argument that the myth of Mundilfœri represents the turning of the sky by a device with a handle is correct, this myth expresses the origins of time, and the sun and the moon are the symbolic children of Mundilfœri only, as they traverse the sky as a result of its motion.

As Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir questions, he is finding out the breadth of the giant's knowledge. This accords with the stated purpose for his journey when he tells Frigg his intentions while asking for her counsel. Óðinn states this further when he arrives as an unknown visitor at the hall of Vafþrúðnir in stanza 6. Besides what the dialogue reveals about the characters in the contest, the questions and answers also reveal to the audience what was known or thought about the distant mythological past in medieval Iceland, whether believed as historically accurate or not. Beyond being a mythical representation about Óðinn's travels to Jötunheimr to visit Vafþrúðnir, *Vm* is also a storehouse of mythological knowledge. The stories are metaphors for how humankind collectively interpret the origins of the natural environment and in turn express them. In the case of Mundilfœri, its meaning may be directly related to keeping time, and as the father of both the moon and the sun (or the creatures Máni and Sól, depending on the interpretation), he is in fact the ancestor of time.[18] Significantly, it is the keeping of time that is stressed as being important in Vafþrúðnir's answer, which may suggest that for the people who created this myth as well as for those who transmitted representations of it, the moon and the sun were important for the sake of keeping time, as they are today in the twenty-first century. The medieval person's primary connection with the moon and the sun would have been through exposure to the natural environment, the progression of the day as well as the phases of the moon.[19]

After asking about the origins of the moon and the sun, Gagnráðr asks further about the cosmogony, posing a question about the origins of the day and the night. This expands further on the division of time and explores the theme introduced in the preliminary round of the wisdom contest about the alternation of light and darkness in the natural environment.

Óðinn kvað:
"Segðu þat it þriðja,
alls þik svinnan kveða

ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan dagr um kom,
sá er ferr drótt yfir,
eða nótt með niðum."

(Tell me this third thing, since you are said to be wise,
and you, Vafthrudnir, know, where day comes from,
he who passes over mankind, or night with its new
moons.)

Gagnráðr picks up on Vafþrúðnir's answer about the sun and the moon, and indeed expands upon the answer he had given to the giant earlier when he was under interrogation. Now he asks for more information about the day and the night, which together form the cycle of the day, a basic unit of time.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
"Dellingr heitir,
hann er Dags faðir,
en Nótt var Nǫrvi borin;
ný ok nið
skópu nýt regin
ǫldum at ártali."

(Delling he is called, he is Day's father, and Night was
born of Norr; new moon and dark of the moon the
beneficent Powers made to count the years for men.)

Vafþrúðnir's answer provides names, which, together with what the giant said in stanza 23, expands on the genealogy of the instruments of time.[20] The reference to the phases of the moon is directly indicative of time and how the phases were created so that humans could count time.[21] Finnur Jónsson suggests that Dellingr may in fact be a name for day itself,[22] which is likely considering that in *Háv* stanza 160 and *Hgát* stanza 6 the phrase "fyr Dellings durum" seems to mean "at dawn." Moreover, in *Fjöl* stanza 34, and possibly in *Háv* stanza 160, Dellingr seems to be a dwarf name, and there is a connection between dwarves and daylight which will be explored below in chapter 7. *Gylfaginning* expands on the myth that is recounted in stanzas 24 and 25 of *Vm*, adding that Dellingr and Nótt—who, according to *Vm*, both descend from Nörvi (Nörfi or Narfi)—marry each other and have a son who is named Dagr.[23]

The moon is historically an important measure of time, just as much as the sun, and together the two form the basic pair of celestial objects by which humans have traditionally measured time. Returning to Eliade, the reader is reminded that "here it will suffice to recall that, if the moon in fact serves to 'measure' time, if the moon's phases—long before the solar year and far more concretely—reveal a unit of time (the month), the moon at the same time reveals the 'eternal return.'"[24] Eliade emphasizes the importance of the moon as a measure of time, which he argues is an even more primary measure than the sun. This is a result of the lunar cycle being shorter in length than the solar year and thus a smaller unit of time. It is made up of a number of days, and all of its phases are important: "the phases of the moon—appearance, increase, wane, disappearance, followed by reappearance after three nights of darkness—have played an immense part in the elaboration of cyclical concepts."[25] The fact that in *Vm* these basic cyclical elements are emphasized in the cosmogonic myth indicates that for the medieval audience there was at the very least an appreciation of the cyclical origins of time that were in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries being challenged by the more linear, Christian conception of time as moving forward from a fixed time in the past toward a fixed time in the future.

In his next question Gagnráðr asks about the origins of winter and summer, extending the genealogy of time to all possible cyclical units, moving from the monthly phases of the moon, through the daily cycle of light and darkness, to the larger units of the seasons. The first four questions provide the basic cosmogonic information about the creation of the earth and the structuring of the temporal order. The Norse-language area was to a great degree a two-season environment, being very high in the northern hemisphere, so just as Dagr and Nótt form the unit of the day, summer and winter together form a whole year.

Óðinn kvað:
26 "Segðu þat it fjórða,
alls þik fróðan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vetr um kom
eða varmt sumar
fyrst með fróð regin."

(Tell me this fourth thing, since you are said to be
wise, and you, Vafthrudnir, know, from where winter
came or warm summer, first among the wise Powers.)

As has been the case with the three previous answers to Gagnráðr's questions, Vafþrúðnir's answer to the fourth question refers to the names of fathers.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
27 "Vindsvalr heitir,
hann er Vetrar faðir,
en Svásuðr Sumars."

(Wind-cool he is called, Winter's father, and Mild One, the father of Summer.)

Vafþrúðnir's answer that Vindsvalr (Wind-cool) is winter's father and Svásuður (Mild One or Mild South) is the father of summer closes the cosmogonic section of the wisdom contest. The genealogy of the cosmos as presented in *Vm* involves a number of fathers: Ymir the father of the earth, Mundilfœri the father of Máni, Dellingr the father of Dagr, Nörvi the father of Nótt, Vindsvalr the father of Winter, and finally Svásuðr the father of Summer. It is interesting how there are two cosmic fathers who appear as the contestants in the poem: Óðinn the father of the gods and Vafþrúðnir the older father figure of the poem. Óðinn will eventually defeat Vafþrúðnir, but in so doing he becomes increasingly aware of his own status as a father who will be defeated at Ragnarök.[26]

Stanza 27 ends after only three lines, and there have been speculations as to what those lines contained, although it is impossible to know with certainty what the words were, if any.[27] It is quite possible that the three final lines of the stanza might have been quite similar to those in stanzas 23 and 25, with the final line thus reading "ǫldum at ártali", for it is natural that the three sets of answers that relate to the passing of time would be similar in content. The same myth is described in *Gylfaginning* chapter 19 and putting aside any desire to reconstruct possibly lost lines, additional information can be taken into account by consulting that passage.

About the first four questions Gagnráðr poses to Vafþrúðnir, Larrington writes the following: "as Óðinn questions Vafþrúðnir about these phenomena, he establishes the origins of the very mechanisms by means of which Time passes and in which history is formed: the daily revolution of the sun; the moon in its phases marking out the months; day and night, winter and summer, and the alternating seasons which make up the year."[28] The placement of these questions at the beginning of Óðinn's questioning of Vafþrúðnir demonstrates the connection of the

celestial bodies and the natural environment with the measurement of time and the importance of the capacity for such measurement to humans. Notably, time is addressed immediately after the creation of the world in the order of questioning, and it may be said that with the creation of the earth and the celestial bodies it became possible to interpret time. There was life before the creation of the world, as we have learned about Ymir and his direct descendants as well as Búri and his descendants, but all of these creatures are or were paranormal. Humans were not created until after the cosmogony, as we learn in *Vsp* stanzas 17 and 18. What is more, the genealogy of the cosmos is given in terms of father figures who have had offspring. The earth had a father, although perhaps a reluctant one, Ymir, as do Máni, Sól, Dagr, Nótt, Vetr, and Sumar. The distant mythological past may therefore be considered to have been "within time" in terms of Ricoeur's first degree of temporal organization, but time could not have been measured before the creation period as the tools for measuring it were not yet in place.

In *Vm* there is not only narrative time, made up of acts and scenes (i.e., sequential time) and configurational time (i.e., the plot that grasps the sequence together). There is also cosmological time, the origins of which are revealed in the first four questions Gagnráðr asks of Vafþrúðnir. The creative act or genesis of the Norse cosmos is the principal subject of stanzas 20 through 27, and by evoking the creation myth in their dialogue the characters reveal how time is measured, not only by the paranormal beings in the mythical cosmos but by all humans. We measure time based on a system that ultimately relies on the celestial bodies, including the earth, the sun, and the moon. Up to the present day it is possible, if not commonly practiced, to read time from a sundial and to mark the passing of the months through observation of the phases of the moon. Furthermore, the coming and passing of the seasons remain an excellent marker for the placement of a moment in relation to the calendar year. The represented myths reveal accepted truths about our human perception of the environment.

These stanzas also relate events that occurred in the distant past in relation to the time period in which the story is taking place, the mythical present of the narrative. So far in the poem, the past, the present, and the future are all being called forth in the action, which places the narrative frame within the mythological time of the Old Norse mythological cycle. In Gagnráðr's first four questions and Vafþrúðnir's first four answers the origins of the mythological past have been posited, and, before turning to the future, the two will continue discussing ancient matters.

Giants

After four questions and answers about the fathers of the cosmos, the origins of the earth, and the celestial bodies, Gagnráðr turns to questioning Vafþrúðnir about the early history of the gods and the giants, the two main antagonistic groups of paranormal beings who inhabit the world in the mythic past, the mythic present, and the mythic future. Although antagonists, the gods and the giants share common origins in the past and as a result the two contestants in *Vm* share common ancestry.

With his fifth question, continuing the theme of questions about paternity, Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir who was the oldest ancestor of the gods and giants.

Óðinn kvað:
28 "Segðu þat it fimmta,
alls þik fróðan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hverr ása elztr
eða Ymis niðja
yrði í árdaga."

(Tell me this fifth thing, since you are said to be wise,
and you, Vafthrudnir, know, who was the eldest of the
Æsir or of Ymir's descendants in bygone days.)

This question builds on the first question that Gagnráðr posed to Vafþrúðnir about the creation of the world in stanza 20 and its corresponding answer in stanza 21, where it was said that from Ymir's flesh the world was created by the gods. Here the question concerns who among Ymir's relatives or the gods was the first to appear in ancient days. This question links the gods and the giants by indicating a common origin rather than asking who was the oldest from each group. Gagnráðr may even be trying to deliberately provoke Vafþrúðnir with this question, for he knows that the giants have older origins than the gods.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
29 "Ørófi vetra
áðr væri jǫrð skǫpuð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn,
Þrúðgelmir
var þess faðir
en Aurgelmir afi."

(Uncountable winters before the earth was made, then
Bergelmir was born, Thrudgelmir was his father, and
Aurgelmir his grandfather.)

Vafþrúðnir states that Bergelmir was the oldest giant or god who appeared in ancient days.[29] The giant names Bergelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Aurgelmir are only attested in *Vm*, which is valuable knowledge about the oldest giants and their lineage.[30] Vafþrúðnir, being very old himself, possesses the knowledge of the oldest of his kin.

Simek suggests that "Aurgelmir is probably identical to the primordial giant Ymir."[31] This assertion is also in line with Finnur Jónsson's interpretation that "Aurgelmir er = Ymir" (Aurgelmir is equal to Ymir).[32] McKinnell further points out that "Snorri states that Aurgelmir is identical with Ymir (*Gylfaginning* ch. 5), though we do not know whether this is based on a lost source, or is merely his own assumption."[33] In any case, the fact that Vafþrúðnir says that the grandfather of the most ancient giant is Aurgelmir makes it highly likely that Ymir is indeed equivalent to Aurgelmir, for it is from Ymir that the earth and sky were made, and it is most likely that it was from the oldest living being at the time that the material was drawn for the creation of the world.

Having learned the genealogy of the oldest giant ancestors, Gagnráðr then asks for more information about them. Digging deeper into Vafþrúðnir's memory, the interrogator seeks more knowledge about the origins of Aurgelmir, the grandfather of Bergelmir, and according to Vafþrúðnir's testimony in stanza 29, the first living being.

Óðinn kvað:
30 "Segðu þat it sétta,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Aurgelmir kom
með jǫtna sonum
fyrst, inn fróði jǫtunn."

(Tell me this sixth thing, since you are said to be wise,
and you, Vafthrudnir, know, from where Aurgelmir
came among the sons of giants, first, the wise giant.)

This sixth question challenges Vafþrúðnir to go beyond mere lineage with his response and to explain how Aurgelmir arose from the elements that

would have existed in the days of the distant mythical past, at a time when there was nothing other than the Ginnungagap.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
31 "Ór Élivágum
stukku eitrdropar,
svá óx, unz varð ór jǫtunn;
þar órar ættir
kómu allar saman,
því er þat æ allt til atalt."[34]

(Out of Elivagar sprayed poison-drops, so they grew until a giant came of them; [from there arose all our clan, thus they are all always terrifying.])

According to Vafþrúðnir, poison is the ancient source of the giants, and thus also of the gods, as the "órar" from line 4 is inclusive and indicates both gods and giants. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (1927–2010) writes that "this element of similarity between the gods and the giants implies a god-like quality to the giants, who nonetheless retain their close links with nature."[35] Alternatively, this similarity could indicate a giant-like quality in the gods. The close link of the giants with nature is also reflected in the use of the parts of Ymir's body to make the earth and the heavens, and furthermore they are often depicted as living on the periphery, away from the human world of Miðgarðr. Randi Eldevik writes that Vafþrúðnir's answer "would seem to provide a reason for the gods' efforts to keep most giants at a distance and/or destroy them—though one still wonders why the Æsir themselves, sharing blood kinship with giants as they do, are not similarly affected by the 'venomous drops' in their ancestry."[36] Maybe the gods are affected, however, for they have a dual nature, both good and bad, creative and destructive. Sigurður Nordal even argued that the downfall of the gods in *Vsp* is ultimately a result of their greed, lust, and oath-breaking.[37]

The myth of the origins of Aurgelmir from the Élivágar is also related in *Gylfaginning* chapter 5, where Gangleri asks how things were arranged before the different families came into being and humankind increased in number: "Hversu skipaðisk áðr en ættirnar yrði eða aukaðisk mannfólkit?" (How were things set up before the different families came into being and mankind increased?).[38] The response expands considerably on Vafþrúðnir's answer, and Hár replies that when the rivers called

the Élivágar came a long way from their source, the poisonous flow that came from them hardened into ice.[39] As the ice solidified, poisonous drops spewed out and froze into an icy rime. Then layer by layer, the ice grew within Ginnungagap. The description of Ginnungagap by Jafnhár and then Þriði continues, and how the warmness from Múspell met with the coldness coming from Niflheimr is related in detail. Ginnungagap continued to thaw and then there was a quickening in the flowing drops and life arose, taking its strength from the source of the heat. What looked like a man then appeared whose name was Ymir. The frost giants call him Aurgelmir, and from him descend the clans of frost giants. It is here where Aurgelmir is equated with Ymir, the first giant from whom the world was created. Gangleri then asks more about Ymir-Aurgelmir, wondering if he was considered to be a god. Hár replies that Ymir-Aurgelmir was in no way considered a god; he was in fact evil, and all his descendants are evil likewise.

Élivágar also appear in the eddic poem *Hym* stanza 5, where the god Týr is quoted as saying that the giant Hymir, who he also says is his father, lives to the east of Élivágar. In this case Élivágar appears to be a single river that has the function of separating the world of the gods from the world of the giants, much like Ífing is said to do in *Vm* stanza 16. In both cases, *Vm* stanza 31 and *Hym* stanza 5, Élivágar (or perhaps Élívága) is associated with the giants. In *Vm* the association has to do with origins whereas in *Hym* the association has to do with geography. Élivágar (again, perhaps Élivága) also appears to be a single river in *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 17, in which Þórr, after he has dueled with Hrungnir and had a whetstone lodged in his head, goes to see Gróa, who helps to remove it for him. During this sequence the following is narrated: "þá vildi hann launa Gró lækningina ok gera hana fegna, sagði henni þau tíðindi at hann hafði vaðit norðan yfir Élivága ok hafði borit í meis á baki sér Aurvandil norðan ór Jǫtunheimum" (wanting to please and reward Groa for her healing, he told the story of his return from the north, and how he had waded across the river Elivagar, carrying Aurvandil southwards from Giant Land on his back in a basket).[40] Here, as in *Hym*, Élivágar appears to be a single river that separates Miðgarðr from Jötunheimr, but rather than lying in the east, as it does in *Hym*, in *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 17 Élivágar is to the north.[41]

There is a further reference to Élivága in *Bergbúa þáttr*[42] where the rivers (or river) are again located to the north, once again on the periphery. The stanza in which the reference appears is as follows:

Stíg ek fjall af fjalli,
ferk opt litum, þopta;
dýpst ferk norðr et nyrðra
niðr í heim enn þriðja;
skegg beri opt sás uggir
ámr við minni kvámu,
brýtk við bjarga gæti
bág, í Élivága,
bág, í Élivága.

(Peak to peak I stride between first light and sunset.
Northwards I go farthest, down along the Hel-road.
I'll fight any giant. Let him fear my coming, the
swarthy mountain-warden, in Elivogar's waters, in
Elivogar's waters!)[43]

This stanza is the seventh of twelve in a sequence. On this stanza, and specifically the reference here to Élivágar, Lindow writes that "the poet says that he travels north down into the third netherworld, and there someone fears his arrival at the Élivágar. The poem is sometimes difficult to understand, but here at least the peripheral location of the Élivágar is assured."[44] Thus, while in *Vm* and *Gylfaginning* the Élivágar are the source of the first life form, the ancient giant Ymir-Aurgelmir, in other sources the Élivágar retain a connection to the periphery, separating the world shared by the gods and humans from the world of the giants.

Having confirmed that Ymir-Aurgelmir originated from poison-drops that came from the Élivágar, Gagnráðr challenges Vafþrúðnir to produce information about how the ancient giant was able to reproduce and generate offspring of his own and on his own. Óðinn's questions continue to press into Vafþrúðnir's knowledge of the history of paranormal beings in the mythological world, and particularly his giant ancestors.

Óðinn kvað:
32 "Segðu þat it sjaunda,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvé sá bǫrn gat
inn *baldni* jǫtunn
er hann hafðit gýgjar gaman."[45]

(Tell me this seventh thing, since you are said to
be wise, and you, Vafthrudnir, know, how he got
children, that fierce giant, when he had no sport with
giantesses.)[46]

To ask how it was possible for reproduction to happen without a female giantess but just one lone male is significant, as it does not seem natural that a male giant could conceive and give birth alone, although because only one figure emerged from the Ginnungagap, this androgyny, the combination of male and female sexual roles, was essential to the production of the second generation of life in the mythological world.[47] To be sure, however, it also does not seem natural that the first primeval being would originate from drops of poison, but in the world of mythical representation the metaphorical interpretations of the paranormal past become the reality of the supernatural world of the text. In response to this question about the first births in the history of the cosmos, Vafþrúðnir tells Gagnráðr how Aurgelmir was able to make his own children.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
33 "Undir hendi vaxa
kváðu hrímþursi
mey ok mǫg saman;
fótr við fœti
gat ins fróða jǫtuns
*sex*hǫfðaðan son."

(They said that under the frost giant's arms a girl and a
boy grew together; one foot with the other, of the wise
giant, begot a six-headed son.)

It is a tale of monstrous births, perhaps more frightening than the account of Ymir-Aurgelmir's own origins. The six heads of the offspring in the final line of stanza 33 may be a way of emphasizing the fact that this offspring is a giant (see, e.g., *Hym* stanza 8 where there is reference to a giantess with 900 heads). Expanding on the information provided by Vafþrúðnir, in *Gylfaginning* chapter 5 Hár states the following: "ok svá er sagt at þá er hann svaf, fekk hann sveita. Þá óx undir vinstri hǫnd honum maðr ok kona, ok annarr fótr hans gat son við ǫðrum. En þaðan af kómu ættir. Þat eru hrímþursar. Hinn gamli hrímþurs, hann kǫllum vér Ymi" (it is said that as he slept he took to sweating. Then, from under his left arm grew

a male and a female, while one of his legs got a son with the other. From here came the clans that are called the frost giants. The old frost giant, him we call Ymir).[48] The *Gylfaginning* account adds that the giant was sweating when he slept, which is similar to how the Ginnungagap was sweating when Ymir-Aurgelmir was created, but there is no mention made of a six-headed son in the *Gylfaginning* account, only that a son was created from his two legs mating together. The androgyny of Ymir-Aurgelmir has led to the group known as the giants, who come from very paranormal origins. According to *Vm* stanza 29, Aurgelmir had a son named Þrúðgelmir, who may have been the son created from his mating legs, or the boy created from under his arm.

Gagnráðr's eighth question moves toward establishing an approximate age for Vafþrúðnir himself, after having learned about the origins of the giants generally, who were created in the long-distant mythic past, a time before the creation of the world and the instruments used to measure time. Gagnráðr asks his host about his earliest memory.

Óðinn kvað:
34 "Segðu þat it átta,
alls þik *svinnan* kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvat þú fyrst *of* mant
eða fremst um veizt,
þú ert alsviðr, jǫtunn."[49]

(Tell me this eighth thing, since you are said to be wise, and you, Vafthrudnir, know, what you first remember or what you know to be earliest, you are all-wise, giant.)

In his answer to the question Vafþrúðnir indicates that he is very old, for in his response he is able to reach back very far, and shows that he was alive during the lifetime of Bergelmir, who, as was told in stanza 29, is the most ancient of the giants.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
35 "Ørófi vetra
áðr væri jǫrð um skǫpuð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn;
þat ek fyrst um man

er sá inn fróði jǫtunn
var á lúðr um lagiðr."

(Uncountable winters before the world was made, then
Bergelmir was born; that I remember first when the
wise giant was first laid in his coffin.)

The movement of Bergelmir into a "lúðr" is the earliest of Vafþrúðnir's memories, which confirms that Vafþrúðnir was alive during the time that Bergelmir was alive, two generations removed from the most ancient giant, Ymir-Aurgelmir. The interpretation of "lúðr" is problematic, however, for it could mean, for example, cradle, ship, or coffin, all of which can lead to drastically different interpretations of the meaning of the stanza. If "lúðr" is interpreted as cradle, it would mean that Vafþrúðnir remembers when Bergelmir was born, or, conversely, if it is taken to mean coffin, it would mean that Vafþrúðnir remembers the death of Bergelmir.[50]

An account of the Bergelmir myth is also given in *Gylfaginning* chapter 7, and it is helpful to consult the relevant passage, which returns to the cosmogonic myth of the creation of the earth through the death of Ymir, where it is said that the sons of Bor killed Ymir. When Ymir was killed so much blood gushed from his wounds that with it the *hrímþursar* were all drowned except for one who escaped with his household, Bergelmir. Bergelmir and his wife climbed up onto a wooden box, "fór upp á lúðr", where they kept themselves safe from the flood, and it is from them that the *hrímþursar* descend. Snorri interprets the "lúðr" to have been a vessel in which Bergelmir and his family sought refuge from the flood that came from Ymir-Aurgelmir's blood after the cosmogonic act, and the story obviously parallels the story of Noah's ark from Genesis 6–8. Lindow writes that "Snorri clearly understood the "lúðr" as something that would float, and the word might in fact have meant 'coffin' or 'chest' or some wooden part of a mill; the expected meaning, of a cumbersome musical instrument something like an alphorn, makes no sense either in Snorri or his poetic source. If there is any consensus here, it is that what Vafthrúdnir remembered was the funeral of Bergelmir, and what Snorri made of it was an analogue to the Judeo-Christian flood story."[51] If Vafþrúðnir's earliest memory is the funeral of Bergelmir, the most logical interpretation of stanza 35 would be that Vafþrúðnir was alive toward the end of Bergelmir's life, and could then be one of his descendants. Tolley argues that in *Vm* stanza 35 "lúðr" is best interpreted as "mill-frame," the tray under a quern that

receives meal after it is ground, and that Bergelmir's placement there occurred at his death, or even caused his death; either way, according to this interpretation, he was ground up in sacrifice, as was his grandfather, continuing or repeating the cosmogonic act.[52] Tolley suggests that another interpretation might be that the Bergelmir myth represents an alternative cosmogonic myth that has been syncretized with the Ymir-Aurgelmir myth by making the former the grandson of the latter.

On the connection between the story of the flood from Ymir-Aurgelmir's blood and the Genesis flood, Gabriel Turville-Petre (1908–1978) explains that "it has often been said that there was no flood in the Norse creation myth, and that Snorri, knowing the story of Noah, felt the need of one. It must, however, be admitted that Snorri's story is altogether unlike the biblical one, and has closer affinities with some recorded among primitive peoples."[53] Like much that is presented in *Vm*, the exact or even relative age of the giant himself remains unknown. One thing that can be stated for certain about the exegesis of the Bergelmir myth that is made in *Gylfaginning* is that *Vm* does not corroborate the myth of the flood resulting from the death of Ymir-Aurgelmir.[54]

Dead Heat

After revealing much about the distant past with four sets of questions and answers about the cosmogony and then four more sets of questions and answers about the ancestral origins of the gods and giants, Gagnráðr abruptly changes his line of questioning and asks about the wind, something that relates to the mythic present. Still challenging Vafþrúðnir to reveal information about origins, the guest asks his host about the source of the wind.

Óðinn kvað:
36 "Segðu þat it níunda,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vindr um kømr,
svá at ferr vág yfir;
æ menn hann sjálfan um sjá."[55]

(Tell me this ninth thing, since you are said to be wise,
and you, Vafthrudnir, know, where the wind comes from
which blows over the waves, which men never see itself.)

The wind would have been an important natural element to the medieval Norse-speaking people, most of whom lived close to the sea, some of whom sailed over it to other lands, and many of whom harvested fish from its waters. The answer that Vafþrúðnir provides has a visual quality to it that is highly metaphorical. The giant replies to his guest and tells him about the source of the wind.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
37 "Hræsvelgr heitir,
er sitr á himins enda,
jǫtunn í arnar ham;
af hans vængjum
kveða vind koma
alla menn yfir."

(Carrion-swallower he is called, who sits at heaven's
end, a giant in eagle's shape; from his wings, they say,
the wind blows over all men.)

Beyond being highly visual, the metaphor is also poetically logical. For a listener, the vision of a large eagle sitting where the sky and the earth meet, on the horizon, beating its wings with the result that wind blows across the sea makes good sense from a mythological point of view. Such an explanation might register to an audience in a similar manner as the metaphor of the horses Hrímfaxi and Skinfaxi, respectively, pulling the moon and the sun across the sky. Although we now know much about the origins of wind and ocean currents through scientific discovery, the Norse poetic expressions for the elements are impressive for their quality, and it can be said that metaphors such as this are lost with scientific explanations that account for wind currents and prevailing winds in the modern age.

Gylfaginning chapter 18 again draws on Vafþrúðnir's answer and adds to it. Gangleri asks the question in a strikingly similar fashion to Gagnráðr: "hvaðan kemr vindr? Hann er sterkr svá at hann hrærir stór hǫf ok hann œsir eld en svá sterkr sem hann er þá má eigi sjá hann. Því er hann undarliga skapaðr" (from where comes the wind? It is so strong that it whips the great oceans and stirs up fire. But as strong as it is, no one can see it, so wondrously is it made).[56] Hár responds to Gangleri's question by saying that "á norðanverðum himins enda sitr jǫtunn sá er Hræsvelgr heitir. Hann hefir arnar ham. En er hann beinir flug þá standa

vindar undan vængum honum" (at the far northern end of heaven sits a giant named Hræsvelg [Corpse Gulper]. He has the shape of an eagle, and when he beats his wings to take flight, the winds blow out from under them).[57] It seems that Snorri derives most of this from *Vm*, but the account in *Gylfaginning* adds the feature to the myth that the giant is at the northern end of the sky and that it is when the eagle-shaped giant wishes to fly that the wind is produced. As for the meaning of Hræsvelgr, it is translated by Larrington (*Poetic Edda*) as Carrion-swallower and Byock (*Prose Edda*) as Corpse Gulper, both of which, according to Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, are part of a long tradition of translating the name in this manner. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson argues, however, that a more accurate translation of Hræsvelgr would be: "the one who swallows shipwrecks and other kinds of flotsam adrift on the ocean, and causes them to be sucked down into the depths."[58] His reasoning is etymological in that the two words in the compound, "hræ" and "svelgr", allow for this meaning. "Hræ", he points out, can mean "corpse" or "dead animal," but it can also mean "wreck" or "wreckage of a ship"; "svelgr", similarly, can mean "swallower" or "gulper," but can also mean "a swirl" or "whirlpool" or "current stream."[59] Within the framework of the question-and-answer pairing presented in stanzas 36 and 37 of *Vm*, which has to do with the sky and the sea, on the edges of which the giant shaped as an eagle sits, Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson concludes that the broadest definition of this giant's name is most appropriate.

Gagnráðr's tenth question is about the origins of the god Njörðr of the *vanir*. The transition from Hræsvelgr to Njörðr is logical, as the giant controls the wind coming over the waves of the sea, the waves are a product of wind meeting water, and Njörðr is the deity of the sea.[60] The transition from a question about a giant to one about a god, although he is of the *vanir*, marks the movement of the questions toward the concerns of the gods.

Óðinn kvað:
38 "Segðu þat it tíunda,
alls þú tíva røk
ǫll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Njǫrðr um kom
með ása sonum
—hofum ok hǫrgum
hann ræðr hunnmǫrgum—
ok varðat hann ásum alinn."

(Tell me this tenth thing, since all the fate of the gods
you, Vafthrudnir, know, from where Niord came to the
sons of the Æsir; he rules over very many temples and
sanctuaries and he was not raised among the Æsir.)

The *æsir–vanir* war is directly referenced here, as the exchange of hostages between the two groups that took place to conclude it resulted in the incorporation of Njörðr into the divine society of the *æsir*, who, as the question makes clear, were distinct from the *vanir*. In *Vsp* the exchange of hostages takes place in the early mythic present, shortly after the creation of the first human pair, Askr and Embla, and in that sense, even though the question is about Njörðr's origins, it is also the first question Gagnráðr poses that touches upon an event that takes place in the mythic present, although the transition was aided by the question about the origins of the wind, which is an element that is of importance to any present time.

Gagnráðr's refrain has also been altered considerably from his previous nine questions, where it was said that Vafþrúðnir was wise or smart, "fróðan" or "svinnan"; here Gagnráðr states that Vafþrúðnir is said to know the fate of the gods, "tíva røk / ǫll". The change in the refrain as well as in the subject matter indicates that Óðinn intends to hear not only about the history and origins of the cosmos, the gods, and the giants, but also to hear about the future, and, as will be the case, the fate of the gods. It could be argued that the change in refrain at this point in the scene could mark a scene change, but the god continues to number his questions through the twelfth question and thus there is a continuity to the sequence of twelve numbered questions and their corresponding answers that overrides any impulse to mark a change in scene. In response the host supplies more ancient knowledge and the name of Njörðr's place of origin.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
39 "Í Vanaheimi
skópu hann vís regin
ok seldu at gíslingu goðum;
í aldar røk
hann mun aptr koma
heim með vísum vǫnum."

(In Vanaheim the wise Powers made him and gave him
as hostage to the gods; at the doom of men he will
come back home among the wise Vanir.)

The knowledge that Njörðr comes from Vanaheimr is confirmed and Vafþrúðnir adds that he will return to the *vanir* at the end of time, a tidbit not known from any other source. There is a combination of the past, that Njörðr was created in Vanaheimr, and the future, that he will return there, or at least he will go somewhere to be among the *vanir*. This shift further traces the movement from concerns of the past into concerns of the present, and then toward the future.

In the two primary sources for the mythical representation of the origins of Njörðr, *Ynglinga saga* and *Gylfaginning*, his movement from the realm of the *vanir* into the company of the *æsir* is narrated along with descriptions of his two children, Freyr and Freyja, and his failed marriage with the giantess Skaði, but there is no indication in either of the sources of his return to Vanaheimr in the future.[61] In *Ynglinga saga* chapter 4 it is told how Njörðr along with his son Freyr and daughter Freyja were sent by the *vanir* to the *æsir* in exchange for Hœnir. The exchange was thought unfair, as Njörðr was the foremost of the *vanir*, and Hœnir proved to be an unworthy exchange as he was unable to make any decisions without the aid of his hostage partner Mímir. This led to the beheading of Mímir, who had been sent to the *vanir* in exchange for Kvasir. It is also said that Óðinn appointed Njörðr and Freyr as priests and the two were considered gods among the *æsir*. In Gagnráðr's question to Vafþrúðnir in stanza 38 it is likewise stated that although Njörðr was not raised among the *æsir*, there are many temples and shrines in his honor. The account given in *Gylfaginning* chapter 23 is much the same as that provided in *Ynglinga saga*. The information provided by Vafþrúðnir adds information about the deity's later return to Vanaheimr. There is no mention made of Njörðr in the descriptions of Ragnarök in the various sources, and that makes it possible that he does indeed return to Vanaheimr, keeping him out of the final battle between the giants and the gods. This estimation, of course, is extra-textual conjecture, and we will never actually know the fate of this god. With the information from *Vm* we can build a theory that he returns to the *vanir*.

The next question Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir deals explicitly with the mythological present, uses a present-tense verb formation, and also alludes to the future. The guest challenges the giant to reveal what he knows about the preparations being made for the coming battle between the gods and the giants.

Óðinn kvað:
"Segðu þat it ellipta,

– – –
hvar ýtar túnum í
hǫggvask hverjan dag."[62]

(Tell me that eleventh thing, where men fight in the courts every day.)

The place where men fight each day is Valhöll, preparing for Ragnarök in the mythic future. In his response to his guest's question, Vafþrúðnir further demonstrates his wide range of knowledge about the geography of the mythic present. Not only does he know about the river Ífing, for the giant asked his guest about this great divide in the vetting sequence, he also knows about what takes place in Ásgarðr, the home of the gods.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
41 "*Allir einherjar*
Óðins túnum í
hǫggvask hverjan dag;
val þeir kjósa
ok ríða vígi frá,
sitja meirr um sáttir saman."

(All the Einheriar fight in Odin's courts every day; they choose the slain and ride from the battle; then they sit the more at peace together.)

It is the *einherjar* who practice each day in Óðinn's enclosures, preparing for Ragnarök. Gagnráðr did not mention the *einherjar* or Óðinn by name in his question, but Vafþrúðnir specifically indicates both in his answer, showing the great reach of his knowledge. Gagnráðr is clearly starting to tread on dangerous ground, for it seems that Vafþrúðnir might soon become aware of who is asking him such detailed questions.[63] And by asking about Óðinn the guest may be dropping yet another hint about his identity.

In the context of *Gylfaginning* chapter 41, where this stanza is quoted, the example of the *einherjar* serves to demonstrate Óðinn's power, as he has such a large army ready at his command, and the fact that Vafþrúðnir knows this indicates that the imminent battle between the gods and the giants is important knowledge. When combined with Vafþrúðnir's question to Gagnráðr in stanza 17 about the site of the bat-

tle between Surtr and the gods, this information further indicates that Vafþrúðnir is concerned about the future, as is Óðinn. As *Vm* progresses, Óðinn's eventual success in the contest is becoming more certain, for there is little chance that the god who rules over the *einherjar* will die before Ragnarök, especially after Vafþrúðnir has confirmed that in the courts of Óðinn, "Óðins túnum í", the warriors train each day, which emphasizes that the mythical representation taking place in *Vm* is happening within the time frame of the mythological cycle, and thus functions as an important myth.

As for the number of *einherjar* who are preparing for Ragnarök, in *Grm* stanza 23 Grímnir states that in Valhöll there are 540 doors and through each door 800 *einherjar* will walk when they go to battle the wolf at Ragnarök. Five-hundred and forty multiplied by 800 equals a total of 432,000 *einherjar* (unless, of course, the hundred here is the long hundred, i.e., 120) that will follow Óðinn to battle at Ragnarök, yet the god will still perish in his struggle with Fenrir. Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) has argued for the significance of the number 432,000 in his comparativist work:

> For example, in the Hindu sacred epics and puranas (popular tellings of ancient lore) the number of years reckoned to the present cycle of time, the so-called Kali Yuga, is 432,000; the number reckoned to the "great cycle" (*mahayuga*) within which this yuga falls being 4,320,000. But when reading one day the Icelandic Eddas, I discovered that in Othin's (Wotan's) warrior hall, Valhöll, there were 540 doors, through each of which, on the "Day of the Wolf" (that is to say, at the end of the present cycle of time), there would pass 800 divine warriors to engage the anti-gods in a battle of mutual annihilation. 800x540 = 432,000.[64]

Campbell then continues to draw further parallels in ancient mythological traditions where the cosmic cycle is equal to 432,000 years, or some derivative of that number. The most obvious difficulty in Campbell's logic is that in Valhöll it is said that there are 432,000 *einherjar*, which is not a number of years in a cosmic cycle, but rather the number of individual warriors who will fight with Óðinn at Ragnarök. Einar Pálsson (1925–1996) absorbed Campbell's comparativist method and devotes some considerable work to furthering the numerological arguments initiated by Campbell, particularly in relation to the number 432,000,[65] and both Campbell and Einar Pálsson present highly interesting theories, although they remain highly speculative. While the gods are able to dominate the present, and

Óðinn win the contest over Vafþrúðnir, no matter what strength the gods can muster for Ragnarök in terms of numbers, the giants will be too much of a challenge to overcome, and many of the gods will perish. Not even a huge army of fallen warriors will be able to help the gods when the older generation meets their fate.

The twelfth numbered question that Gagnráðr asks of Vafþrúðnir is very precise, directly challenging the giant about how he knows of the fate of the gods and is able to speak of so many secrets. Vafþrúðnir is put on the spot by Gagnráðr, who asks him to reveal the source of his own knowledge. Up until this point the guest has been asking about mythological facts, but now the question is personal.

Óðinn kvað:
42 "Segðu þat it tólpta,
hví þú tíva røk
ǫll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir;
frá jǫtna rúnum
ok allra goða
segir þú it sannasta,
inn alsvinni jǫtunn."

(Tell me this twelfth thing, why all the fate of the gods
you, Vafthrudnir, know; of the secrets of the giants and
of all the gods tell most truly, all-wise giant.)

This question, like those preceding it, is logical in relation to what has come before it, as he has been asking questions to which Vafþrúðnir does have the answers, although it has been regarded by Ruggerini as falling outside the rules of the contest. Vafþrúðnir will surely know the answer to this question, but Ruggerini argues that "the way the question is asked allows us to take it that the god, by contrast, does not know what the reply will be, or is not sure of it."[66] These possible warning signs are lost on Vafþrúðnir, however, and even though Óðinn's question is not really a mythological question, the giant will respond.

After Vafþrúðnir has been able to answer many questions about the past and is even aware of events that will transpire in the future, Óðinn might be wondering at this point if his decision to come and test the giant was a wise one. Vafþrúðnir knows about some of what transpires in Ásgarðr, and if there is a point when the god is concerned about the outcome of the contest it might be at this moment. Now, the giant is asked to

reveal how he knows what he knows. However, with foreknowledge of his own fate, knowing that he will die at Ragnarök and not before, Óðinn has made this step in asking the question, as risky as it may seem.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
43 "Frá jǫtna rúnum
ok allra goða
ek kann segja satt,
þvíat hvern hefi ek heim um komit;
níu kom ek heima
fyr Niflhel neðan,
hinig deyja ór helju halir."

(Of the secrets of the giants and of all the gods, I can
tell truly, for I have been into every world; nine worlds
I have travelled through to Mist-hell, there men die
down out of hell.)

Vafþrúðnir has visited the world of the dead, as Óðinn likely did when he hung on the windy tree for nine nights in a sacrifice that is detailed in *Háv* stanzas 138 through 141.[67] These nine worlds may be the same ones that the *völva* speaks about in *Vsp* stanza 2, when she remembers nine worlds and nine wood-dwelling witches and the seed of Yggdrasill. The *völva* has most likely risen from the world of the dead, Óðinn is known to have traveled to the world of the dead (by interpretation), and now Vafþrúðnir states that his travels there are the source of his knowledge. Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir are not so different, it appears.

Although the audience is well aware of Óðinn's fate, and it is accepted that he will die at and not before Ragnarök, the suspense of the action is rising as Vafþrúðnir reveals his most ancient wisdom. Óðinn appears to have met someone who is well matched to him, and the audience now knows that the two share at least one similar experience in relation to the acquisition of knowledge. As McKinnell writes, "few can share the knowledge which Óðinn has pursued among the dead by his sacrifice of himself on Yggdrasill."[68] Óðinn has found out how wise Vafþrúðnir is, and his statement in his twelfth question confirms this, as he calls Vafþruðnir "inn alsvinni jǫtunn", indicating he thinks that Vafþrúðnir is wise, not just that he has heard others say that about him. This mirrors what Vafþrúðnir said to Gagnráðr in stanza 19, after he has vetted him: "fróðr ertu nú, gestr". Now that both contestants have established that they hold the other in

high esteem, all that is left is to determine who is more wise. The final six questions will decide the contest.

In the series of twelve questions and answers that have been analyzed in this chapter, Gagnráðr first asks Vafþrúðnir four questions that concern the cosmogony, including the creation of the earth, the ordering of the celestial bodies, and the genealogy of the seasons. The giant supplies answers that are informative about that period in the distant mythological past. Then there were four questions with corresponding answers about the ancestors of the gods and the giants and the origins of the paranormal beings who play out the events in the mythological past, present, and future. The final four questions and their answers add content about the mythological present and amplify the suspense of the narrative, allowing Vafþrúðnir to demonstrate his vast knowledge, and perhaps making Óðinn wary of his opponent. These last four questions tell the myths about Hræsvelgr, the giant who controls the wind and the sea, about Njörðr, the deity of the sea, about the army of *einherjar* who will support the gods and Óðinn at Ragnarök, and, last but not least, about the source of Vafþrúðnir's wisdom in the form of his journey to the worlds of the dead. Gagnráðr still has six more questions with which he will challenge Vafþrúðnir, all concerning the mythological future. These first twelve questions have very effectively weaved the narrative time of *Vm* in with the timeline of the mythological cycle.

The first twelve questions and answers are a detailed history of the mythic cosmos up to the mythological present and the connection between the information transmitted in the dialogue and the narrative of the story is clear, as they both reflect the cosmological cycle of the mythological world view, that of past, present, and future. The background has been set for the contest that is underway, between the god and the giant who share common origins and are in a battle of words to the death. On the arrangement of questions by Gagnráðr, Larrington writes:

> Óðinn's interest in past history throughout the greater part of Vafþrúðnismál is not simply a series of red herrings, meant to lull Vafþrúðnir into a false sense of security while Óðinn takes an indirect approach to the crucial question. Vafþrúðnismál sets out an allusive exploration of the origins and history of the cosmos, with all that entails for and explains temporal power. It shows how, with the authority which their knowledge of the origins of the created world gives them, the giants come to be pre-eminent at the close of the mythic present and the coming of the *ragna rǫk* era.[69]

The line of questioning that Gagnráðr has put to Vafþrúðnir certainly has brought the subject from the distant past into the mythological present. The shape of the poem mirrors the cosmological cycle found in the Old Norse mythological sources, with a movement from cosmogony to eschatology, from birth to death, which reinforces the connection between the content of the poem and its form. The twelfth question shows the two contestants as most evenly matched, as the gods and giants will be when they face off at Ragnarök. Some of the gods will survive the final battle and inhabit the renewed world, just as Óðinn will survive the wisdom contest. Vafþrúðnir is still unaware of his guest's true identity, or if he has his suspicions he does not voice them. I contend that at the end of the first twelve questions and answers that Gagnráðr has put to Vafþrúðnir, the giant is still confident in his ability to win the contest.

The second scene of act two concludes at this point, after Gagnráðr has asked a series of twelve numbered questions and received twelve answers in return from Vafþrúðnir. As will be shown in the next chapter, Gagnráðr's change in refrain marks the final major structural division in the narrative that calls for a change in scene.

NOTES

[1] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 10.

[2] There is a missing leaf in the A manuscript directly prior to where its version of *Vm* begins, which suggests that the A manuscript originally contained the whole of the poem.

[3] The episode of the narrative represented in stanzas 20 through 43 provides the audience with an encyclopedic version of Vafþrúðnir's knowledge, and concludes with the source of his knowledge. See Kragerud, "De mytologiske spørsmål i Fåvnesmål," p. 33.

[4] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 20.

[5] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:359.

[6] Schjødt, "Völuspá—cyclisk tidsopfattelse i gammelnordisk religion," p. 93.

[7] Larrington, "Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography," p. 63.

[8] Lindblad interprets the similarities between *Vm* and *Grm* in terms of manuscript orthography, including capital letters, letter shapes, and the use of special characters; he argues that these two poems may have been first recorded into manuscript form together, before being transcribed into the R manuscript. See his "Poetiska Eddans förhistoria och skrivskicket i Codex regius," p. 158.

[9] Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, p. 324.

[10] On the sacrifice of Ymir, Clunies Ross argues that it is "a collective act in

which a recognisable social group sacrifices an alien individual to promote the good of their own society or avert an impending disaster." *Prolonged Echoes* 1:190.

[11] A. Gurevich, "Space and Time," p. 52.

[12] The different spellings in editions of the poem can be attributed to different spellings in the manuscripts. "Mundilfǫri" in R (likely to represent œ); "Mundilfæri" in A; and "Mundilfari" in R^2 and W. See Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:360.

[13] Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., p. 413.

[14] Tolley, "The Mill," p. 75.

[15] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *Icelandic-English Dictionary*, p. 437.

[16] Geír T. Zoëga, *Dictionary of Old Norse*, p. 307.

[17] Tolley, "The Mill," p. 75. See also Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth*, 1:302–3.

[18] Different editors and translators take *máni* and *sól* to be either proper nouns or referential nouns which refer to the celestial objects sun and moon. Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál*) interprets them as referential nouns whereas Larrington (*Poetic Edda*) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði*) consider them to be proper nouns. The result of considering them as proper nouns is to capitalize their initial letters. See McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 13.

[19] *Gylfaginning* presents a somewhat different version of the myth of Máni and Sól than *Vm*. In the *Gylfaginning* version Mundilfœri was a man who had two children, one named Máni and the other Sól; as a punishment for the hubris of naming his children after the celestial bodies the gods sent both children up into the sky where they had to assist the celestial bodies; thus Máni controls the waxings and wanings of Moon while Sól drives the horses that pull Sun. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, pp. 13–14.

[20] See *Alv* stanza 29, where Þórr poses a question to Alvíss which resembles Gagnráðr's question to Vafþrúðnir in *Vm* stanza 24, asking who night is, who was born to Nörvi. In *Alv* stanza 30, Alvíss replies that Nótt is the name of night among men.

[21] On the ordering of the cosmos and the creation of time, see Ciklamini, "The Chronological Conception," pp. 142–43.

[22] Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 57.

[23] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 13.

[24] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, p. 86.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ármann Jakobsson, "A Contest of Cosmic Fathers," pp. 266–72. Mundal points out that the association between the giants and nature is not necessarily a negative association, and the association between the giants and chaos must be called into question, considering that the descendants of the giants in *Vm* are indeed associated with the fundamental ordering of time. About this and the personification of the seasons as descendants of the giants, see Mundal, "Forholdet

mellom gudar og jotnar I norrøn mytologi i lys av det mytologiske namnematerialet," p. 7.

[27] On the truncated stanza 27, see Bugge, introduction to *Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 69.

[28] Larrington, "Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography," p. 66.

[29] On the three names (Bergelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Aurgelmir), see Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:361; and Tolley, "The Mill," pp. 73–74.

[30] Bergelmir is also attested in *Gylfaginning* chapter 7, where *Vm* stanza 35 is quoted. See Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 11. Aurgelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Bergelmir all appear as giant names in the *þulur*. See *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1:323–24. Thus *Vm* is the only narrative source where these giant names are independently attested, as the mention of Bergelmir in *Gylfaginning* relies on *Vm*, and the *þulur* are non-narrative sources, lists for skaldic poets to draw from.

[31] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 329.

[32] Finnur Jónsson, introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, p. 57.

[33] McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 11.

[34] This stanza also appears in *Gylfaginning* chapter 5, and lines 4–6 of this stanza only appear there. See Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:361; and Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 88.

[35] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, "Hræsvelgr, the Wind-Giant, Reinterpreted," p. 24.

[36] Eldevik, "Less than Kind," p. 94. Ciklamini asserts that even though the origins of the giants are from venom-drops, it is not necessarily the case that giants are solely malicious. See her article "Óðinn and the Giants," p. 94.

[37] Sigurður Nordal, "Three Essays on *Völuspá*," p. 129.

[38] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 9; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 13.

[39] Motz argues that Aurgelmir was miraculously born from icy waves, which differs from the most common interpretation that the Élivágar are a series of rivers. See her article "Giants in Folklore," p. 76.

[40] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. 22; Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, p. 89.

[41] The placement of the giants to the east and to the north in Old Norse mythological narratives may preserve an archaic Norway-centric view, for those directions would have been associated with unfamiliar people, but south and west with Christian people. See Ármann Jakobsson, "Where Do the Giants Live?," p. 107.

[42] *Bergbúa þáttr* is preserved in AM 564 a 4to, a parchment manuscript from Vatnshyrna. See Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Introduction to Bergbúa þáttr, pp. cciii–ccxii.

[43] *Bergbúa þáttr* , pp. 446–47; *The Tale of the Mountain-Dweller*, p. 446.

[44] Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, p. 109.

[45] The Íslenzk fornrit use *baldni* (fierce), which appears in A, to replace *aldni* (old) in R, as it matches the alliteration pattern.

[46] An alternate translation of the last line of stanza 32 might read: "when he had no sport with a giantess."

[47] Mundal argues that "the androgynous Ymir is a more striking symbol of chaos where everything in the beginning of time existed in embryo and unseparated than the concept of a pair of giants, one male and one female." "Androgyny," p. 8. Clunies Ross breaks with the tradition of viewing Ymir-Aurgelmir as androgynous or bisexual, arguing that "the Old Norse sources do not support the conceptualisation of a being with both male and female reproductive organs." *Prolonged Echoes*, 1:152. Even though the sources, as Clunies Ross correctly points out, do not mention the dual physiology of Ymir-Aurgelmir, that does not mean that the figure does not function androgynously in the abstract sense.

[48] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, pp. 10–11; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, pp. 14–15.

[49] *svinnan* here replaces *fróðan*, which appears in both R and A, because alliteration requires it and stanzas 30, 32, and 36 all use this formulation. The italicized *of* appears in A, and is added here by the Íslenzk fornrit editors, though it does not appear in R.

[50] Machan offers "cradle" or "bier" as possible meanings for "lúðr", but he favors "cradle" because the context is the recollection of an early memory. Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 90.

[51] Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, p. 75.

[52] Tolley, "The Mill," pp. 72–73.

[53] Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, p. 276.

[54] Stephens describes the inheritance in the medieval period of ancient Hebrew ideas about giants. See his book *Giants in Those Days*, pp. 64–72. On this cultural inheritance Eldevik argues that "when the Norse portrayal of giants is juxtaposed with that in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, a comparable situation obtains (*mutatis mutandis*, of course, for in a monotheistic context there are bound to be differences from what occurs in polytheistic myths): the Book of Genesis describes giants as the offspring of rebel angels who mated with human women in antediluvian times, thus giving biblical giants a quasi-familial relationship to God himself and reasons for envious resentment toward Heaven and its denizens similar to that of the classical giants toward Olympus and the Olympians, or of the Norse giants toward Ásgarth and the Æsir. Each of the three traditions involves a gigantomachy in which divine forces must defend celestial territory against the giants' violent efforts to encroach upon it." "Less than Kind," p. 86.

[55] *ok* is added by the Íslenzk fornrit editors, since it appears in A, and Óðinn's previous stanzas of speech use this formulation (see stanzas 34, 32, 30, 28, 26, 24, 22, and 20).

[56] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 20; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 29.

[57] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 20; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 29.

[58] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, "Hræsvelgr, the Wind-Giant, Reinterpreted," p. 27. Eldevik contends that Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson "fails to account for Hræsvelg's eagle form," which leads Eldevik to advocate for a connection between Hræsvelgr and the Beasts of Battle. "Less than Kind," p. 100.

[59] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, "Hræsvelgr, the Wind-Giant, Reinterpreted," p. 26.

[60] Ármann Jakobsson contends that Njörðr's inclusion in the topics of discussion in *Vm* is connected to his control over the elements, making reference to *Gylfaginning* chapter 23 to strengthen this connection. "Contest of Cosmic Fathers," p. 271.

[61] On the marriage of Skaði and Njörðr, see Lindow, "When Skaði Chose Njǫrðr," pp. 178–79; Clunies Ross, "Why Skaði Laughed," p. 7; and McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, pp. 62–64.

[62] Bugge provides a version of stanza 40 lines 2 through 6 based on text from paper manuscripts that reads: "alls þú tíva rök / öll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir: / hvat einherjar vinna / Herjaföðrs at, / unz rjúfask regin?" Introduction to *Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 71. Machan translates Bugge's rendering of the full stanza, adding the extant first line, as: "Tell that eleventh, Vafþrúðnir, since you might know all the fates of the gods: what do the champions of Óðinn do until the gods are destroyed?" Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 95.

[63] The textual problems with stanzas 40 and 41 are extensive. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason note that there are fractures in both the R and A manuscripts around these stanzas, and that it is likely that the missing words in stanza 41 spring from "hǫggvask hverjan dag" in stanza 40; stanza 41 is whole in *Snorra Edda* and is used in the Íslenzk fornrit edition. Introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:363.

[64] Campbell, *Inner Reaches*, p. 35.

[65] Einar Pálsson, *Rammislagur*, pp. 185–97 and pp. 335–41.

[66] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 175.

[67] The interpretation that during Óðinn's nine nights of hanging he visited the dead can be countered with an interpretation that during those nine nights he was undergoing a sacrifice and remained alive, enduring the initiation so that he could then learn the secrets of the runes. Lassen compares Óðinn's hanging with Christ's hanging, arguing for an interpretation that Óðinn's ordeal is an inverted crucifixion, "serving to illustrate that Old Norse paganism is a flawed misunderstanding of Christianity. Thus the stanzas of Óðinn's hanging seem to be consistent with the doctrine of paganism as misunderstood or inverted Christian doctrine." "God on the Tree," p. 241.

[68] McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, p. 101.

[69] Larrington, "Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography," p. 68.

Chapter Six

The Odinic Attack

THE NARRATIVE OF *VM* reaches its climax in the final scene and swiftly undergoes its denouement. Vafþrúðnir will lose his life after the final question Gagnráðr poses as he can provide no answer to it. Óðinn will presumably return to Ásgarðr after having accomplished his goal of finding out where his host's wisdom reaches its limit. Revisiting the critical approach of the present work, which has been to divide *Vm* into two acts, the first act composed of the scene with Óðinn and Frigg, and the second act composed of three scenes between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, the drama is soon to end with the curtain falling on the wisdom contest. In these final twelve stanzas, the subject decidedly turns to the mythological future, and the final question, which relates to an event that occurred early in the mythological present, in fact determines Vafþrúðnir's future or lack thereof. Even though Baldr's death is an event that occurred in the past in relation to the wisdom contest, its consequences permeate the mythological present and indeed are the origins of the events that will transpire in the mythological future, leading eventually to Ragnarök, and indeed, in the case of *Vm*, to Vafþrúðnir's defeat and death. The event of Baldr's death is central to *Vm*, as it is to *Gylfaginning* and the mythological cycle generally.

The final section of the poem has six sets of questions and answers, and the first five questions are all about the future, all of which Vafþrúðnir can answer.[1] These first five questions likely represent Óðinn's primary purpose for his journey, which is to confirm his fate. After these five questions, there is a sixth and final question that turns back to the past. The focus of the question is a mythological event that has more influence over the course of events than most others, the death of Baldr; Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir what Óðinn said to his son at his funeral. The final question is not a question, but more of a final statement that Óðinn makes to convey to Vafþrúðnir that the contest is over, and in so doing the guest reveals his true identity. Vafþrúðnir, for his part, is gracious in defeat. He may have

known that if he were to meet Óðinn he would perish, but he does not find out until it is too late.

The final six questions and their respective answers can be grouped into three sub-groupings.[2] The first four questions and their answers deal with the regeneration of the world after Ragnarök. Then there is one question-and-answer pairing that deals with the death of Óðinn. The final question is the question that refers to Baldr's death. All the questions share the structural feature of the refrain "Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaðak, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin", the same phrase Óðinn used earlier in stanza 3 when he was talking to Frigg.

Regeneration

After reviewing the cosmic history of the Norse mythological world in order to determine the scope of Vafþrúðnir's wisdom, during the course of which events that pertain to the mythic past, the mythic present, and even some events of the mythic future were brought forth, Gagnráðr now makes a noticeable change in the form by which he poses questions to the giant. Gagnráðr alters his refrain at stanza 44 and then uses the same refrain for his six final questions. The refrain he employs is the same one he used when speaking to Frigg in stanza 3 of the poem after she expressed her concern for his proposed journey to go and visit the giant Vafþrúðnir. Óðinn may be recognizing his host's great wisdom by using the refrain, for with it Gagnráðr asserts his own experience in a way that may be an assertion of his ability to contest with Vafþrúðnir. He may also be trying to move toward a quick and efficient end to the contest, demonstrating his confidence and experience. The refrain may also reflect a change in attitude that Óðinn, who is still in disguise as Gagnráðr, has undergone after hearing in stanza 43 that Vafþrúðnir has traveled through all of the worlds and the nine worlds of the dead in order to gain his wisdom. To defeat Vafþrúðnir, Óðinn must call on his own experience.

The next four questions all relate to the mythic future and are no longer concerned with the history of the gods and giants or the landscape and events of the mythological present. The change in subject is reflected by the change in form, and, as Machan forwards, "it is the information on the Ragnarǫk about which Óðinn has presumably been most curious all along, and so the switch from indirect to direct questioning perhaps reflects greater interest and intensity on Óðinn's part."[3] When Óðinn employs this refrain earlier in the poem in stanza 3 its intensity registered

with Frigg, as she knew there was nothing she could do to prevent Óðinn from going on his proposed journey. The same degree of intensity is readily perceived here.

Óðinn kvað:
44 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvat lifir manna,
þá er inn mæra líðr
fimbulvetr með firum?"

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much
have I tested the Powers; which humans will survive
when the famous Mighty Winter is over among men?)

By asking which humans will survive the great winter which will precede Ragnarök, Gagnráðr essentially asks which humans will survive Ragnarök, as here "fimbulvetr" appears to refer to Ragnarök itself.

Stanza 44 contains the first direct reference made to humans in the poem, other than when Vafþrúðnir asks what man had come into his hall in stanza 7 line 1 and the "ýtar" of stanza 40, who are, Vafþrúðnir clarifies in stanza 41, the *einherjar*. The introduction of humans into the poem coincides with the first question that directly asks for information about the mythic future, particularly about the distant future after Ragnarök. The "fimbulvetr" is mentioned in *Gylfaginning* chapter 51, when Hár describes to Gangleri the events of Ragnarök, saying that first a winter will arrive called "fimbulvetr", during which snow will come from all directions. During the "fimbulvetr" the cold will be severe, the winds fierce, and the sun will be of no use. Three of these winters will come, one after the other, and there will be no summer in between. But before that there will have been another three winters, during which great battles will take place throughout the world.[4]

Although evoking the image of the great series of winters, Gagnráðr is in fact most interested in hearing what the giant knows about the humans who will survive Ragnarök. Vafþrúðnir demonstrates with his response that he does know what will transpire in the distant future.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
45 "Líf ok Lífþrasir,
en þau leynask munu

í holti Hoddmímis;
morgindǫggvar
þau sér at mat hafa,
þaðan af aldir alask."

(Life and Lifthrasir, and they will hide in
Hoddmimir's wood; they will have the morning dew
for food; from them generations will spring.)

Líf and Lífþrasir are the only two humans who will survive the *fimbulvetr* and the ensuing Ragnarök. Even though the great battle will eradicate much, it will not take all human life from the earth. *Hoddmímis holt* is most likely the world-tree Yggdrasill, as Mímir's well is associated with Yggdrasill. Simek argues that "Hoddmímir can most likely be identified with the trunk of the world-tree Yggdrasill, as Mímir and his spring are associated with Yggdrasill."[5] If the two humans who survive Ragnarök have done so in the trunk of Yggdrasill, then it is probable that the world-tree has also survived Ragnarök. Líf, according to Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, is "the only woman who will survive Ragnarök," and Lífþrasir "the only man who will survive Ragnarök."[6] This suggests that the first human couple in the world as it is reborn after Ragnarök will be parents to children naturally born, unlike the first descendants of Ymir, who were androgynously reproduced from the ancient giant's own body.[7] Furthermore, the couple have protected themselves in the trunk of a tree, which echoes the creation of the first couple from driftwood (as we know it from *Vsp* stanzas 17–18 and *Gylfaginning*).

If there is to be human life in the post-Ragnarök world, there will also have to be a suitable natural environment to sustain such life, and the world will be largely destroyed in the great battle between the gods and the giants at Ragnarök. The second of Gagnráðr's final six questions challenges Vafþrúðnir to reveal that a sun will come into the sky in the world that is reborn, for Fenrir will take the sun from the sky when the time for Ragnarök arrives. The introduction of Fenrir indicates that Gagnráðr is bringing the questions into a more personal sphere, for the audience understands the guest is Óðinn in disguise, and they presumably also know from *Vsp* that Óðinn will meet Fenrir in battle at Ragnarök and succumb to the monster's strength. Here, repeating the refrain he has used so convincingly with Frigg and now for the second time with Vafþrúðnir, Gagnráðr asks for more information about the future.

Óðinn kvað:
46 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvaðan kømr sól
á inn slétta himin,
þá er þessa hefir Fenrir farit?"

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much have I tested the Powers; from where will a sun come into the smooth heaven when Fenrir has destroyed this one?)

Without the sun there is no possibility of life continuing, and the days of Líf and Lífþrasir would be limited. As outlined in Gagnráðr's earlier questions and Vafþrúðnir's corresponding answers in stanzas 24 and 25, without the sun the days could not be kept track of, and thus the mechanisms for keeping track of time would not be in place. The world might thus remain in a state like it was before the cosmogonic act, a formless mass. With the regeneration of the sun, time is again measurable, and thus the eternal return and the rotation of the heavens are again made possible.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
47 "Eina dóttur
berr Álfrǫðull,
áðr hana Fenrir fari;
sú skal ríða,
þá er regin deyja,
móður brautir mær."

(Elf-radiance will bear a daughter, before Fenrir destroys her; she shall ride, when the Powers die, the girl on her mother's paths.)

The sun is here referred to as Álfröðull, as it also is in *Skm* stanza 4, in stanza 12 of the skaldic poem *Guðmundardrápa* by Árni Jónsson, in the *lausavísur* of Eyvindr skáldaspillir, and in the *þulur*. Vafþrúðnir states that Álfröðull will give birth to a daughter before Fenrir captures her, and the daughter will take the place of her mother as the new sun in the sky. The regeneration of the sun mirrors the regeneration of the reproductive cycle of humanity, making the celestial mother-and-daughter couple anthropomorphic.

As is the case for humans, the offspring replaces the parent; as a mother bears a child, the child may in turn have offspring, and the natural cycle of life continues. Ragnarök is an extreme example of a myth of generational succession, where the children must take the place of their dead parents. For those who originally composed the poem perhaps it meant something in regard to the death that each human must face, and the story may thus provide reassurance to its audience that after the older generation is gone, no matter how devastating it may seem, those who succeed them will continue living. It is also said that the new sun will rise after Ragnarök concludes, after the gods have perished: "sú skal ríða, / þá er regin deyja".

Gagnráðr continues to press Vafþrúðnir for knowledge about the future. The guest, who is much less humble now than he was earlier, asks for information about maidens who will arrive at some point in the future.

Óðinn kvað:
48 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hverjar ro þær meyjar
er líða mar yfir,
fróðgeðjaðar fara?"

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much have I tested the Powers; who are those girls who glide over the sea, wise in spirit, they journey?)

The identity of "þær meyjar" is ambiguous, but they do recall the image of the three "þursa meyjar" from *Vsp* stanza 8 in both the R and H manuscripts. In *Vsp* their arrival signals an end to the golden age for the gods, the mythic past, and the beginning of the period of the mythic present. In *Vsp* the gods were said to have been together in the meadow playing board games and making merry after the creation of the world, with much gold, until the arrival of three giant maidens. It may be possible that these three maidens come again after Ragnarök as a signal of the end of a second golden age of the gods, those who will survive Ragnarök. The cycle that has played out in the mythic past, the mythic present, and the mythic future, resulting in Ragnarök and the rebirth of the world, will be played out again, and those who inhabit the reborn world will be condemned to repetition of the former. Machan notes, however, that "the words

fródgediaþar and *hamingior* [see stanza 49], in the context of a discussion of the new and better world to come, would seem to suggest that the *meyiar* are beneficent beings."[8] Machan cites R. C. Boer, who asserts that rather than representing the three maidens who arrive in *Vsp* stanza 8, "sie bilden ein verklärtes gegenstück zu den *þursa meyjar*, welche Vsp 8 das unglück in die welt bringen" (they form a transfigured counterpart to the "þursa meyjar", which in *Vsp* 8 bring misfortune into the world).[9] One would hope that the wise Vafþrúðnir would help to clarify the obscurity of stanza 48, but unfortunately the contents of the contest are reaching so far into the future that even the giant's response will not clarify things completely.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
49 "Þrjár þjóðár
falla þorp yfir
meyja Mǫgþrasis;
hamingjur einar
þeira í heimi eru,
þó þær með jǫtnum alask."

(Three mighty rivers flow over the settlement of
Mogthrasir's girls; theirs are the only protective spirits
in this world, although they were raised among giants.)

Mögþrasir is a figure only known from this poem, and it cannot be said with certainty that he is a giant, so even though Vafþrúðnir answers that the three maidens were raised among the giants, it is uncertain where their origins ultimately lie.[10] A likely interpretation, however, is that these three maidens, from whatever lineage, may represent the Norns, those who will control the fates of humankind in the world after Ragnarök as they do in the mythic present. As fate is such a prevalent and dominating force in the mythic past, the mythic present, and the mythic future, there is no reason to think that the world as it is reborn after Ragnarök would lack the Norns. Lindow argues that "these females appear to be the norns, or perhaps simply the fetches of humans, as the variant reading in AM 748 I 4to has it: 'hamingior einar þær í heimi ero' ('they are fetches alone in the world'). The feminine remains associated with fate, as with procreation."[11] As the post-Ragnarök world is inhabited by humans and members of the younger generation of the gods, it can be expected that the Norns who will control their fates and destinies would also need to be present for the reborn world to progress as the pre-Ragnarök world did.

Another interpretation is possible when comparison is made with *Hgát*. In *Hgát* the following stanza is found, in which Gestumblindi, Óðinn in disguise once again, challenges Heiðrekr with the following riddle:

> "Hverjar eru þær meyjar,
> er ganga margar saman
> at forvitni föður;
> hadda bleika
> hafa þær, inar hvítfölduðu,
> ok eigut þær varðir vera?"
>
> (Who are those maidens going many together, by their
> father unceasing sought; pale their hair is and their
> hoods are white, yet these maidens know no man?)[12]

In response, Heiðrekr answers: "Þat eru bylgjur, er svá heita" (Those are the waves that are thus named).[13] This is the second of three consecutive riddles in *Hgát* to which the answer is "waves," suggesting that such riddles are traditionally Odinic. The form of the two questions, the one posed by Gagnráðr and the one posed by Gestumblindi, is similar and it is possible that they can inform one another, for at this stage of the wisdom contest of *Vm*, the guest may be asking a riddle of his host rather than a mythological question about the future.

Before considering this further, however, it is also helpful to consult *Bdr*, another poem in which a similar question is asked. In that poem, Óðinn, this time in disguise as Vegtamr, goes to question a *völva* or seeress about the bad dreams that his son Baldr has been having. His final question to the *völva* is given after she says "nú mun ek þegja" (now I'll be silent). Even though the *völva* wishes to say nothing, Vegtamr persists and gets his way.

> Þegjattu, vǫlva,
> þik vil ek fregna,
> unz alkunna,
> vil ek enn vita:
> Hverjar ro þær meyjar
> er at muni gráta
> ok á himin verpa
> hálsa skautum?

> (Don't be silent, seeress! I want to question you, until all is known, I want to know more: who are those girls who weep for their pleasure and who throw up to the sky the corners of their neckerchiefs?)

The *völva* responds by unmasking Óðinn, saying that he is not Vegtamr. Óðinn in turn responds by saying that the *völva* is not a *völva* at all, but Loki, the "þriggja þursa móðir" (mother of three ogres). For some reason this question, which is like the two instances in *Vm* and *Hgát*, unmasks the speaker as Óðinn to the *völva*. The similar question does not have the same effect on either Vafþrúðnir or Heiðrekr, however, and in both of those cases the dialogue continues with Óðinn retaining his disguise. If the *völva* in *Bdr* is Loki, his intimate knowledge of the *æsir* may give him more insight.

Ruggerini, on the *völva*'s recognition of Vegtamr as Óðinn in *Bdr*, argues that "it seems to me that this unexpected recognition is due to the fact that the prophetess has the immediate impression that this question is peculiar, different from those that have gone before, and that it is not really a wisdom question at all, but more of a riddle."[14] According to Ruggerini, it is due to Óðinn being known as an asker of riddles that the *völva* is able to unmask him.[15] The implication that the examples in *Hgát* and *Bdr* have for *Vm* stanzas 48 and 49 is that what Óðinn is asking Vafþrúðnir may not be so much a wisdom question fit for a wisdom contest about mythological knowledge, but rather a riddle, as the example from *Hgát* is, firstly, in the frame of a riddle contest, and, according to Ruggerini's analysis, Vegtamr's use of the riddle-type question in *Bdr* is what unmasks him as Óðinn to the *völva* in that poem. By posing a riddle in *Vm*, Gagnráðr may be asking Vafþrúðnir a question that tests his wits and not merely his wisdom. As indicated by his response, Vafþrúðnir answers the question in the terms of the wisdom contest, and the result is an answer that is obscure. About the giant's response, Ruggerini argues that

> it is now difficult if not impossible for us to be sure whether Vafþrúðnir's answer is mythologically well-founded or not. We must be content with appreciation of the subtle but effective contrast between Óðinn's wit and Vafþrúðnir's blind seriousness (that is, his lack of intuition). The god had unexpectedly used a riddle formulation in the middle of a wisdom challenge; the giant—unwittingly fooled, but not taken aback—can conceive an answer which we can trust to be correct and learned, but is not able to respond to Óðinn's cunning verbal challenge.[16]

Ruggerini's interpretation is certainly plausible, especially when considering the parallel examples in *Hgát* and *Bdr*, where similar questions are posed within the frame of a riddle contest.

Gagnráðr now asks Vafþrúðnir directly about which gods will survive Ragnarök and inhabit the world that is reborn.

Óðinn kvað:
50 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hverir ráða Æsir
eignum goða,
þá er slokknar Surtalogi?"

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much have I tested the Powers; which Æsir will rule over the gods' possessions, when Surt's fire is slaked?)

This question further confirms that Ragnarök will eventually end and afterwards there will be a new beginning with a new world inhabited by humans and divine beings. The new world will retain parts of the old world, as Líf and Lífþrasir were both alive before the "fimbulvetr" and Mögþrasir's maidens may represent the return of the Norns to the world, or at least their persistence. According to Vafþrúðnir, some of the gods will also survive, specifically those of the younger generation.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
51 "Víðarr ok Váli
byggja vé goða,
þá er slokknar Surtalogi;
Móði ok Magni
skulu Mjǫllni hafa
Vingnis at vígþroti."

(Vidar and Vali will live in the gods' sanctuaries, when Surt's fire is slaked; Modi and Magni shall have Miollnir and demonstrate battle-strength.)[17]

Víðarr and Váli are Óðinn's sons. Víðarr, according to *Vsp* R stanza 53 and *Vm* stanza 53, is present at Ragnarök and avenges the death of his father by killing Fenrir. Móði and Magni are the sons of Þórr, if we interpret

Vingnis as a Þórr name, which is likely due to its similarity to Vingþórr (see *Þvk* stanza 1, *Alv* stanza 6, and the *þulur* for Vingþórr as a *heiti* for Þórr). The association is also logical, for they are said to take up the hammer when *Vingnis* dies.[18] Magni also appears in *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 17, when after Þórr has killed the giant Hrungnir he assists his father by moving Hrungnir's leg off of him: "þá kom til Magni, sonr Þórs ok Járnsǫxu. Han var þá þrívetr. Hann kastaði fœti Hrungnis af Þór" (then Magni, the son of Thor and Jarnsaxa, arrived; he was three years old at the time. He flung Hrungnir's leg off Thor).[19] Both Magni and Móði are also named as the sons of Þórr in *Skáldskaparmál* chapter 4 when kennings for Þórr are listed, and he is said to be the father of Magni, Móði, and Þrúðr.[20] Magni seems to be a personification of Þórr's strength, as demonstrated by his ability to move Hrungnir's gigantic leg off of his father, and Móði perhaps of Þórr's disposition toward bravery, as Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson suggest his name means "the brave one."[21] These four sons, according to Vafþrúðnir, the two sons of Óðinn and the two sons of Þórr, will survive Ragnarök.

The gods who will survive the great battle against the giants are those of the younger generation, and they will continue the divine lineage of the *æsir* into the new world even though their parents have perished. In *Vsp* R stanza 60 (*Vsp* H stanza 54), however, it is said that Baldr and Höðr will return after Ragnarök to inhabit the new world. Baldr will rise from the dead and Höðr will accompany him from Hel and they will live in Valhöll, "Hropts sigtóptir". *Vsp* and *Vm* thus agree that it is the younger generation of gods who will survive Ragnarök, but in the account given in *Vsp* Baldr and Höðr resurrect. In *Vsp* R stanzas 31 and 32 Baldr is killed by the mistletoe that was shot by Höðr, and in *Vsp* R stanzas 32 and 33 it is said that Óðinn bore another son to avenge Baldr's death. The son's name is Váli who, according to *Bdr* stanza 11, was borne by Rindr in the period of a day to avenge the killing of Baldr by Höðr. According to Vafþrúðnir, however, Óðinn's two sons that survive are the avengers: Víðarr is the avenger of his father Óðinn and Váli the avenger of his half-brother Baldr, who he never knew.[22] The two versions of the survivors of Ragnarök differ considerably, and represent quite different moral viewpoints. The *Vsp* text shows the innocent surviving (Baldr, Höðr, and Hœnir, the sole god from the older generation to survive), whereas the *Vm* version shows virtues of courage, strength, and justified vengeance surviving (Móði, Magni, Váli, and Víðarr).

In the *Vm* account, Óðinn's two sons who have avenged the deaths of their relatives will survive along with the sons of Þórr, who, inheriting

his hammer, will serve roles similar to their father. John Stanley Martin, on the death of Þórr and the survival of his sons, writes: "the god who sustains life has fallen, and his sons renew the attributes of his power and the means of making them effective. The fact that they may be personifications of aspects of the god's nature and that their significance is only eschatological does not detract from the importance of their function in myth. The return of Magni and Móði after the fall of the gods means that the new order can be established."[23] As with the daughter of the sun who will replace her mother, Óðinn's and Þórr's sons will replace their fathers. There is no mention of any goddesses who will survive Ragnarök. Perhaps the age of the gods does fade away and the age of humans who descend from Líf and Lífþrasir will eventually replace the old order.

Fate

In the penultimate question of the wisdom contest between the god and the giant, Gagnráðr asks about Óðinn's fate at Ragnarök. Still masked, the visitor thus ironically asks his host about his own fate. Vafþrúðnir is known to be wise, and has proven his wisdom in the contest so far, but remains unaware as to who he shares his hall with even after several hints have been given. Óðinn may indeed be reaching the primary goal of his quest, the reason for which he made his journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall: to confirm his own fate. To do so, he must ask Vafþrúðnir about one of the main events that will take place at Ragnarök.

Óðinn kvað:
52 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvat verðr Óðni
at aldrlagi,
þá er rjúfask regin?"

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much
have I tested the Powers; what will Odin's life's end be,
when the Powers are torn apart?)

The *einherjar* who train each day in preparation for Óðinn's battle with the wolf will be unable to help the god when he meets Fenrir. It is likely Óðinn already knows this piece of mythological information about his

own fate, but he seeks to confirm it by asking Vafþrúðnir. The giant has already shown himself to have foreknowledge of events to come.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
53 "Úlfr gleypa
mun Aldafǫðr,
þess mun Víðarr *v*reka;
kalda kjapta
hann klyfja mun
vitnis vígi at."[24]

(The wolf will swallow the Father of Men, Vidar will avenge this; the cold jaws of the wolf he will sunder in battle.)

Vafþrúðnir thus confirms the prophecy that Fenrir the wolf will swallow Óðinn and Víðarr will avenge his father's death by splitting the wolf's jaws.

The myth of Óðinn's death and Víðarr's subsequent taking of blood vengeance for it is elaborated in *Gylfaginning* chapter 51, in which Hár also says Fenrir will swallow Óðinn. Hár adds that immediately afterward Víðarr will come forward and thrust one of his feet into the lower jaw of the wolf. On that foot Óðinn's son wears the shoe that has been assembled through the ages by collecting the extra pieces that people cut away from the toes and heels when fashioning their shoes, and thus, it is said, those who want to help the gods should throw these extra pieces away. With one hand Víðarr takes hold of the wolf's upper jaw and rips apart its mouth. With this thrust Víðarr kills the wolf and avenges his father. Within the narrative of *Gylfaginning*, as in *Vm*, Ragnarök is in the mythic future, but in the version of the myth of Víðarr's vengeance in *Gylfaginning* there is the additional practical element about the shoe that he wears. This fable states that those who wish to help the gods in the fateful battle can contribute to the cause, suggesting that the sources from which Snorri Sturluson drew upon in his composition of *Gylfaginning* considered Ragnarök to be in the future from the time of composition. Even if the assertion is not in earnest, it still demonstrates that at some point these stories might have been living myths for early audiences, which would suggest that people actually did believe in these divine beings and also that they may have somehow lived alongside them. Traditions about Víðarr's vengeance did vary, however, as observable even in the variation in *Vsp* stanza 53 of R, where it is said Víðarr stabs a sword into Fenrir's heart rather than ripping apart the monster's jaws.[25]

It is astonishing that up until Gagnráðr's second-to-last question Vafþrúðnir still does not know who is questioning him. Gagnráðr has been asking questions with increasing specificity, narrowing the topic all the way down to the fate of Óðinn at Ragnarök. One of the most important aspects of Óðinn's death at Ragnarök is that it is not his first death, but his second, if, as discussed above, his self-sacrifice in *Háv* is interpreted as a death or journey to the world of the dead. In the myth of Óðinn's self-sacrifice as it is told in the *Rúnatal* section of *Háv* in stanzas 138 through 141, the speaker recounts how he left the world of the living and entered the world of the dead. This myth details one of the great sources of Óðinn's knowledge, for while on his journey he gained knowledge of the magic runes, which in turn gave him control over magic spells and even the ability to make his own magic. One question that arises at this point is to what extent does Óðinn gain any new wisdom from his encounter with Vafþrúðnir, if any? Turville-Petre proposes that the god does in fact learn much valuable information from the giant: "Óðinn, god of poetry, runes and magic, acquired much of his wisdom from his giant relatives, and particularly from the wise giant Vafthrúðnir. Vafthrúðnir could tell the secrets of the giants and of all the gods for he had travelled through all the nine worlds; he had even penetrated Niflhel, into which men pass from the world of death (Hel), as if dying for a second time."[26] If Vafþrúðnir is in fact a source of wisdom for Óðinn, and not just an opponent for Óðinn to test his own wisdom against, it might be because he does actually have more experience than Óðinn. Vafþrúðnir is destined to enter the world of the dead for a second time, a journey from which we presume he will not be able to return. Óðinn will join Vafþrúðnir with his own second death at Ragnarök, a death from which he also will not return. It is possible that because *Vm* contains no mention of the Odinic self-sacrifice the two myths may have existed quite separately from each other before the manuscript tradition brought them into contact, and thus there would be no necessity to relate them, and in the limited context of the *Vm* myth Óðinn is therefore still approaching his first death.

Turville-Petre's assertion that Óðinn acquires wisdom from Vafþrúðnir opens the possibility for a whole new interpretation of the poem, for it is most often considered to be a wisdom contest in which the contestant who is asking the questions must be in possession of the answers to the questions that he asks, or else he would not be able to evaluate the correctness of the answer. However, if Óðinn is gaining wisdom from Vafþrúðnir, he could not be in possession of the answers and would

be learning new information with each answer the giant provides. If this is the case, either the god is able to trick the giant into believing that he is in possession of the answers or the two contestants are not holding a wisdom contest as such, but rather it is an interrogation, and during the second and third scenes of act two Óðinn is interrogating Vafþrúðnir for knowledge of the past, the present, and the future. The final question Gagnráðr asks challenges this, however, for it would not be possible for Vafþrúðnir to discover his opponent's identity after the final question has been asked as the guest asks a question to which only he can know the answer. This is how the giant knows he has lost.

Defeat

The final question Gagnráðr poses to Vafþrúðnir is more of a statement than a question. With this final question, the veil over the face of the guest is lifted and Gagnráðr reveals his true identity: Óðinn of the *æsir*. The audience has been aware of this fact during the whole of the contest, the second act of the two-act drama, and Vafþrúðnir now learns it as well. To end the contest, in true Odinic fashion, Óðinn must ask a question that nobody but the foremost god of the Norse pantheon and his dead son can possibly know. The knowledge in question is esoteric in the most restricted sense possible.

Óðinn kvað:
54 "Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvat mælti Óðinn,
áðr á bál stigi,
sjálfr í eyra syni?"

(Much I have travelled, much have I tried out, much have I tested the Powers; what did Odin say into his son's ear before he mounted the pyre?)

It is here that Gagnráðr reveals himself to be Óðinn by asking what Óðinn said into the ear of his son at his son's funeral before he mounted his pyre. The son is Baldr, for there is no mention of any other of Óðinn's sons who die and have a funeral, and therefore this knowledge can only be known by Óðinn and Baldr, as it was said from one to the other: "í eyra syni" (into

his son's ear). There is no other mythological source that mentions Óðinn having said anything to Baldr on his funeral pyre.

The most detailed description of the funeral, and particularly of the moment when Baldr is put on the pyre, appears in three passages from *Gylfaginning* chapter 49. The first passage is as follows: "en Æsirnir tóku lík Baldrs ok fluttu til sævar. Hringhorni hét skip Baldrs. Hann var allra skipa mestr. Hann vildu goðin fram setja ok gera þar á bálfǫr Baldrs" (the Æsir took Baldr's body and carried it to the sea. Baldr's ship was called Ringhorn and it was the greatest of all ships. The gods wanted to launch it and use it for Baldr's funeral pyre).[27] Then the following passage: "þá var borit út á skipit lík Baldrs, ok er þat sá kona hans Nanna Nepsdóttir þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó. Var hon borin á bálit ok slegit í eldi" (Baldr's body was carried out on to the ship, and when his wife, Nanna Nep's daughter, saw this, her heart burst from sorrow and she died. She too was carried on to the funeral pyre, which was then set on fire).[28] And, finally, the third passage from *Gylfaginning* chapter 49: "Óðinn lagði á bálit gullhring þann er Draupnir heitir. Honum fylgði síðan sú náttúra at hina níundu hverja nótt drupu af honum átta gullhringar jafnhǫfgir. Hestr Baldrs var leiddr á bálit með ǫllu reiði" (Odin laid the gold ring Draupnir on the pyre. It had the characteristic afterwards that, every ninth night, eight gold rings of equal weight dripped from it. Baldr's horse, with all its riding gear, was led onto the pyre).[29] In the *Gylfaginning* description of Baldr's funeral there is no mention of Óðinn whispering anything into Baldr's ear, even though Snorri Sturluson was familiar with at least parts of *Vm*, and most likely the whole poem, for he quotes it extensively. Not only are the words which Óðinn might have whispered into the ear of his dead son a mystery, but the very event of Óðinn whispering any words into Baldr's ear is also a mystery. What Óðinn whispered to his dead son is unknowable to anyone, possibly including him, and most definitely it is unknown by us.

There is, however, another instance where Óðinn asks this same question, which constitutes a second indirect reference to the event in question, namely what Óðinn said into the ear of his dead son. In *Hgát* it is the final question Gestumblindi poses to Heiðrekr. There, in a similar manner to what is written in *Vm*, Gestumblindi, the one whose identity is hidden to others or who guests do not discern, poses a riddle to the king.

> Þá mælti Gestumblindi:
> "Segðu þat þá hinzt,
> ef þú ert hverjum konungi vitrari:

Hvat mælti Óðinn
í eyra Baldri,
áðr hann vær á bál hafiðr?"

(Tell me this then last of all, if you are wiser than
any other king: What said Ódin in the ear of Balder,
before he was borne to the fire?)[30]

The question in *Hgát* is the same in content as the question posed in stanza 54 of *Vm*, if it can be accepted that in *Vm* the son that Gagnráðr refers to is in fact Baldr, which is generally accepted as being the case. This similarity suggests that either the two sources derive from a common source, or that one was based on the other. McKinnell writes, on the ending of *Hgát*, that it is "unlikely that the author of *Heiðreks saga* (who uses much ancient material not found elsewhere) derived it from *Vafþrúðnismál*: the name Gestumblindi, the confrontation with a king rather than a giant (which is shared by the prose epilogue of *Grímnismál*) and the story of why the falcon has a short tail all suggest an independent Odinic source, now lost."[31] The more likely scenario, McKinnell argues, is that both the wisdom contest in *Vm* and the riddle contest in *Hgát* represent a common story pattern, and they are as such independent manifestations of that pattern. In both cases Óðinn uses the same question to end the contest, but this does not mean that one was based on the other; rather it points to the likelihood that they come from a common tradition of Odinic wisdom dialogues of which only a few are extant.

When he responds to Óðinn's final question Vafþrúðnir knows he is defeated. Óðinn has revealed himself by asking a question that only he can possibly know the answer to, if he actually did whisper some words into the ear of his dead son.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
55 "Ey manni þat veit,
hvat þú í árdaga
sagðir í eyra syni;
feigum munni
mælta ek mína forna stafi
ok um ragna røk."

(No man knows what you said in bygone days into
your son's ear; with doomed mouth I've spoken my
ancient lore about the fate of the gods.)

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
56 "Nú ek við Óðin deildak
mína orðspeki;
þú ert æ vísastr vera."[32]

(I've been contending with Odin in words of wisdom;
you'll always be the wisest of beings.)

And thus the poem ends with Vafþrúðnir defeated and Óðinn having accomplished his goal of contending with the giant in wisdom. In the end the god brings about Vafþrúðnir's death, although he also confirms his own eventual demise. From the moment Óðinn entered Vafþrúðnir's hall until the last question is delivered, the giant did not know he was contending with the god. When Gagnráðr's true identity is revealed as Óðinn, Vafþrúðnir can do nothing but admit defeat, for Óðinn has proven his extraordinary ability in knowledge. *Vm*, placed after *Háv* in the R manuscript, has thus built on the theme of Óðinn as a character who has much to do with knowledge. In *Grm* Óðinn will again overtake an adversary on a trip away from Ásgarðr, during which he will profess knowledge, and in *Hrbl*, Óðinn will outwit Þórr of the *æsir*. Þórr, however, is not very intelligent, although our analysis of *Alv* in the next chapter of the present text may challenge this assumption, so arguably Óðinn's outwitting of him is not a great feat. Though, perhaps Þórr is cleverer in *Alv* than he is in *Hrbl*, for different poets presented different views of the heathen gods, and Óðinn's success in *Hrbl* may demonstrate the power of wit over that of strength and might not even be meant to comment on Þórr's intelligence (or lack thereof). In his encounter with Vafþrúðnir it can be said with certainty that even though Óðinn is in control of the encounter for the entirety of the contest, he has indeed faced a great challenge. Vafþrúðnir has, like Óðinn, traveled into the world of the dead and gained knowledge from his journey; at the end of his life the giant is at least wise enough to realize he cannot contend with Óðinn.

King Heiðrekr does not prove to be as humble (or wise) in defeat as Vafþrúðnir. His response to Óðinn is strikingly different. As for Vafþrúðnir, it is with a question which relates to what Óðinn said into Baldr's ear that the contest is ended: "Heiðrekr konungr segir: 'Þat veiztu einn, rög vættr.' Ok þá bregðr Heiðrekr Tyrfingi ok höggr til hans, en Óðinn brást þá í valslíki ok fló á brott. En konungr hjó eptir ok af honum vélifiðrit aptan, ok því er valr svá vélistuttr ávallt síðan" ('You alone know that, vile creature!' cried Heidrek, and he drew Tyrfing and slashed at Ódin, but he

changed himself into the shape of a hawk and flew away; yet the king, striking after him, took off his tailfeathers, and that is why the hawk has been so short-tailed ever since).[33] Although the two questions posed by Óðinn are essentially the same in both *Vm* and *Hgát*, the responses from the defeated contestants are quite different. Whereas Vafþrúðnir is humble in his defeat, realizing that he has lost the contest to Óðinn and that there is no way he can escape his fate, King Heiðrekr is angry and still tries to harm Óðinn, although with no real success. The retreating Óðinn, who takes on the shape of a hawk, is struck by the magical sword Tyrfingr, and a fable explaining why hawks have short tail feathers is the result.

The ending to *Vm* is not without its drawbacks for Óðinn. While defeating the giant in the giant's own hall, Óðinn also confirms his own death at Ragnarök in the jaws of Fenrir. Confirmation of this knowledge came as a result of the final question-and-answer pairing in the poem before Óðinn terminates the contest with his final and unanswered, or indeed unanswerable, question about Baldr's funeral. Ármann Jakobsson, working within a Freudian framework that compares the mythical representation in *Vm* with the Oedipus myth, writes that "the son's victory over the father is double-edged, for the father role brings with it certainty of death. For the son, the father's death is tantamount to facing his own mortality."[34] In this case Óðinn is the son and Vafþrúðnir the father. Even though Óðinn is powerful enough to overcome Vafþrúðnir, he, the *æsir*, and the *einherjar* will not be able to overcome the forces of the giants at Ragnarök, who will have Loki and his children on their side. This is representative of how during the mythological present the gods are able to defeat the giants, but when Ragnarök arrives in the imminent mythological future, the two opposing forces will all perish. The only survivors are two humans, Líf and Lífþrasir, and a handful of gods from the younger generation. There is no mention made in the sources of a younger generation of giants, although Mögþrasir's maidens, if we interpret them to belong to this obscure character, and we interpret this obscure character to be a giant, may represent the parallel continuation of the giant lineage in the world that is reborn.

The fact that the death of Baldr occurs earlier in the mythological present than the myth of *Vm*, when the myths are configured together, indicates that in the world of the texts Ragnarök is close at hand. The end of *Vm* leaves its audience aware of the mortality of the paranormal and supernatural gods and giants. This dramatic work draws its audience through its two acts and four scenes by providing a complete-in-itself

timeline of the Old Norse mythological cosmos. Time does move in a line, from the creation to the destruction, but there is a regeneration that urges the audience to wonder if after death there is a new life, and if there is, how many times the cycle of destruction and regeneration will repeat. Is the return eternal?

Ricoeur's framework for narrative analysis gives us the basic analytical tool to pull apart the narrative, and I have separated it into temporal units that are based on a progression of time (i.e., action) through the plot. The plot can also be divided in terms of space, which has been indicated in the chapter headings ("At Home in Ásgarðr," "The Guest Waits on the Floor," "Sitting on the Giant's Bench"). In the conclusion I return to the primary argument that opens the present work, that literary criticism can bring forth meaning on (at least) three levels: the first level is the formal level, and all that is left for us on that level is to sum up our findings about the dramatic character of the text of *Vm*, for throughout the book I have conducted an exegetic reading of the poem; the second level is the historical level, and by recalling the instances in the poem that are most important when considering the theories of Gurevich and Eliade, some conclusions can be drawn about how in *Vm* remnants of the pre-Christian belief system can be identified that have been incorporated and preserved by the Christian culture of thirteenth-century Iceland, and thus expressed in mythological texts such as *Vm*; finally, the present work concludes by situating itself within the critical field. *Vm* is deserving of a narrative analysis that emphasizes a close reading of the text(s) and compares the contents of the poem with related sources. This work has attempted to do just that, and as such I hope this study complements critical editions of the poem.

While going through the in-depth analysis of the poem, there has been a great degree of configuring, assembling, and even blending of narratives, which may be indicative of a tendency to assume a single mythology composed of the extant textual witnesses. This is supported with the argument that the poem is itself a representation of myth that belongs among interconnected myths that make up a mythology. These texts, however, may not have been read together in this way in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and this was likely also the case for their oral predecessors. Myths may connect in an integrated mythology but they may also exist independently and in variation. Variety has been a constant at all stages of representation for Old Norse poetry, and at each instance when comparisons are made in this book there is a simultaneous awareness of and critical reflection on the methodology. Thus an exploration is made

of both the merits and limits of an additive style of comparative criticism performed alongside a close reading.

Before proceeding to the conclusion of the present work, however, the same framework that has been applied to *Vm* is now applied to *Alv* in a much shorter case study. The intention of this next chapter is to demonstrate that this method of textual analysis is applicable to any eddic poem, and perhaps to any Old Norse poem from the medieval period.

NOTES

[1] Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 1:140–41.

[2] Although the questions can be divided into three themeatic groups, all six have the same refrain, making it an over-arching group. See Kragerud, "De mytologiske spørsmål i Fåvnesmål," p. 34.

[3] Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 98.

[4] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 49.

[5] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 154.

[6] Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., p. 376.

[7] Lífþrasir appears in R as Lífðrasir, which Machan defines as "'Persistent Life' (an agent noun literally meaning 'the one who fights for life') or, if derivation from *þrasa* ('to rage') is presumed, something like 'raging or impetuous life.'" There are different forms in different manuscripts, however, and Machan continues, contending that "Læifþrasir in [A, R^2, and W] would mean something like 'Persistent Remnant' or 'Persistent Survival'" and, finally, that "Leidþrasir ('Persistent Way') in T is nonsensical in context and so must be a scribal error." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 99.

[8] Ibid., p. 102.

[9] Boer, *Die Edda*, p. 58.

[10] About the name, Machan contends for the following meaning: "*Mǫgþrasis*: 'Persistent Son' (an agent noun literally meaning 'the one who fights for a son') is another obscure figure unique to *Vafþrúðnismál*. The element *þrasir* suggests that he may be related to *Lífðrasir*." Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 103. Boer goes as far as to argue that Lífþrasir and Mögþrasir are the same being. *Die Edda*, p. 58. For further analysis, see Gering, *Die Lieder der Edda*, p. 177. One primary issue is which word the genitive case of Mögþrasir connects with: *meyja* or *þorp*. If Mögþrasir construes with þorp, then the three maidens of stanza 49 come over Mögþrasir's land or dwelling (i.e., the world reborn), and Mögþrasir is most likely equal to Lífþrasir; if construed with meyjar, then Mögþrasir is most likely a giant. Machan's interpretation of the meaning "Persistent Son" is most likely accurate for either reading, for being alive after Ragnarök demonstrates persistence in the best sense. Simek argues that "'the one striving for sons'

would seem to give more or less the correct meaning" and that "the supposition that Mǫgþrasir and Lífþrasir are one and the same mythological person has little to be said for it." *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 221. See also Sturtevant, "Semantic and Etymological Notes," p. 134.

[11] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, p. 173. An alternate translation of the line as it appears in A might read: "they are the only fetches in the world."

[12] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, p. 222; *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, p. 40.

[13] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, p. 222; *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, p. 40.

[14] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 186.

[15] Beyond the two examples that involve Óðinn (in *Bdr* and *Hgát*), in *Fm* stanza 12, the young hero Sigurðr, an Odinic figure as well as a descendant of Óðinn, asks a strikingly similar question to what Óðinn asks in *Vm*: "Segðu mér, Fáfnir, / alls þik fróðan kveða / ok vel margt vita: / Hverjar ro þær nornir / er nauðgǫnglar ro / ok kjósa mœðr frá mǫgum?" (Tell me, Fafnir, you are said to be wise and to know a great deal; which are those norns who go to help those in need and bring children forth from their mothers?). Here, rather than referring to *þær meyjar*, Sigurðr asks directly about *þær nornir*, having used the Odinic formula to introduce his question.

[16] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 187.

[17] An alternate translation of the last three lines of stanza 51 (which would agree with the text as presented in A and the *Snorra Edda* manuscripts) might read: "Modi and Magni shall have Miollnir at the end of the battle."

[18] There is variation in how the final line of stanza 51 appears in manuscripts. R reads "oc vinna at vígþroti", whereas A and the *Snorra Edda* manuscripts read "Vingnis at vígþroti" (the U manuscript is altered slightly to "Vignigs synir"). The meaning in all cases suggests Þórr's sons take up his work after his death. See Machan, introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 68 and pp. 105–6; see also Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, introduction to *Eddukvæði*, 1:365.

[19] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. 22; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 89.

[20] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. 14.

[21] Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., p. 411.

[22] Váli has survived the killing of Höðr and now, it is said, will survive Ragnarök. A further comparison can be drawn between Víðarr, son of Gríðr, and Váli, son of Rindr, for both are takers of vengeance, and, as it happens, both are survivors. See McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 159 and p. 162.

[23] Martin, *Ragnarǫk: An Investigation*, p. 135.

[24] *vitnis* here refers to the wolf, and this is how it appears in *Vm* stanza 53 line 6 in A. In R it appears as "vingnis" or possibly "Vingnis", which is most likely a scribal error, perhaps resulting from the appearance of "Vingnis" in stanza 51 line 6, a *heiti* for Þórr; even though in R stanza 51 line 6 is altered slightly, opening with

"ok vinna", it is probable that "Vingnis" was the most usual form, as A, R^2, and W present it as such, and "ok vinna" a scribal emendation.

[25] The myth of Víðarr's taking of vengeance is represented on the Gosforth Cross from Cumbria, England, dated to the first half of the tenth century, where Víðarr is depicted tearing apart Fenrir's jaws, consistent with the myth as presented in *Vm* stanza 53. See Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, p. xviii, pp. 74–77, and p. 106.

[26] Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, p. 49.

[27] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 46; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 67.

[28] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 46; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 67.

[29] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, p. 47; Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, p. 67.

[30] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, p. 225; *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, p. 44.

[31] McKinnell, "The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*," p. 160.

[32] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði*) print *Vm* in fifty-six stanzas, a break from the traditional division of the poem into fifty-five stanzas. Vafþrúðnir's final stanza of speech is rather long, and traditonally considered one lengthy stanza of *ljóðaháttr*, but now the Íslenzk fornrit editors break it into two stanzas, with stanza 56 constituting a half-stanza.

[33] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, p. 225; *Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, p. 44.

[34] Ármann Jakobsson, "Contest of Cosmic Fathers," p. 274.

"This page intentionally left blank"

Chapter Seven

Looking to *Alvíssmál*

IN THIS CHAPTER AN interpretation of *Alv* is undertaken to test the applicability of a Ricoeurian narrative analysis to other works from the corpus of eddic mythological poetry. Specifically, it will be shown how *Alv* can, like *Vm*, be viewed as a representation of a myth as well as a narrative framework, and as such how the influence of pre-Christian mythology (i.e., the myth) survives in a Christian form (i.e., the narrative framework). The framework is adapted to preserving the myth and the mythological language of the poem.

Alv is a natural choice to turn to for a comparative dimension in a work for the most part dedicated to *Vm*. Like *Vm*, *Alv* has as its core a wisdom dialogue between a god and a paranormal being, in this case a dwarf rather than a giant, and there is a death, or at least a presumed death, at the end of the narrative. In both cases the *æsir* succeed. As was the case with the extended analysis of *Vm* provided in the preceding chapters, this chapter provides a close double reading of the poem: *Alv* as a myth and also as a mythic framework. The poem is a version of a myth in its own right, for it presents Þórr of the *æsir* in dialogue with the paranormal Alvíss in a scene that can be seen as a mythic event taking place in the mythological present of the grand mythological narrative. The mythological cycle is again constructed by adding narratives together; the merits and problems of this method have been addressed earlier in the present text. *Alv* is also a narrative framework, for in the dialogue information about the languages of mythical beings and humans is conveyed to the audience, in particular how the different classes of beings refer to various phenomena. This chapter thus views *Alv* through a similar analytical lens as the whole book uses to view *Vm*. I also include a short critical background to the poem, an introduction to the characters in the poem, an analysis by way of a close reading of the poem, and finally I present a short conclusion on how the present interpretation of the poem contributes to scholarship of the poem and of Old Norse mythology. Unlike the preceding analysis of *Vm*, this

chapter does not give close attention to each stanza of speech in the poem, due mostly to lack of space, and the conclusions are largely drawn together with the overall concluding arguments in the final chapter of the book. This shorter treatment of *Alv* results in less attention being given to the role of language in the poem (a primary focus of much earlier criticism) but more focus on the structure of the myth.

Our study began with an introduction to the temporal theory of Ricoeur, and the same method of analyzing a text applies to the present chapter. A Ricoeurian analysis helps us to separate the narrative time of *Alv* into two dimensions: the episodic dimension—that is, the unfolding of the action of the myth—and the configurational dimension, which helps us to account for the mythological information provided in the poem and also to place the myth within the larger mythological context. The temporal framework used in the present study is the one supplied by Clunies Ross and Lindow. No less important has been the theoretical contribution of Gurevich and Eliade, who remind modern interpreters of the importance of considering the hybrid nature of time in the medieval period. Medieval temporality was mostly a linear model that allowed for a cyclical dimension, although to a great degree Christianity suppressed the cyclical to the linear. As Christianity came to Iceland, therefore, the cyclical model was increasingly replaced by the linear model, and to some extent the two models were combined.

Alv is a dialogic poem in *ljóðaháttr*, and the poem would most likely have been performed in the medieval period by a poet or actors. A different cast of characters takes the stage in *Alv* than in *Vm* and the poem is structured differently in terms of setting. The whole of *Alv* takes place in Ásgarðr, as opposed to *Vm*, which begins in Ásgarðr and ends in Jötunheimr. The narrative framework of the two poems is somewhat similar, however, which is that of the wisdom contest, and one that is a life or death situation. In *Vm*, it is Óðinn of the *æsir* who seeks to take something from the paranormal Vafþrúðnir, particularly the giant's cosmological knowledge and a confirmation of the future so that he can prepare for his own death. In *Alv*, the dwarf Alvíss is attempting to take Þórr's daughter as his bride.[1] The dynamic is thus different: in *Vm*, the giant is on the defensive, as Óðinn has come to his home; in *Alv* it is Þórr who is on the defensive, for the dwarf has come to the home of the gods and threatens their dominance over their female members, and thus over much else. It is likely that the poet of *Alv* modeled the frame of the poem on *Vm*, as a con-

test between a god and a paranormal adversary. At the beginning of *Alv* it is a paranormal other who is the aggressor.

Alv is only found in the R manuscript of eddic poetry from manuscripts surviving from the medieval period. In R it is situated as the final poem in the section of poems dedicated to mythological themes. It appears after *Vkv*, which features an elf, and thus it may fittingly form a pair with that poem. This is because *Alv* features as a main character a dwarf, a paranormal being that is neither a god nor a giant, the two most commonly appearing groups of characters in the mythological poems. After *Alv*, the R manuscript proceeds to the legendary poems that comprise the heroic cycle, centering around the lives of human characters and featuring a number of paranormal beings in supporting roles. Therefore, by including paranormal characters from the elf and dwarf groups in leading roles, *Vkv* and *Alv* provide a transition to the poems that focus predominately on the human characters and their interactions with one another and some paranormal beings. The paranormal thus does not leave the R manuscript after *Alv*, but it changes.

Two stanzas from *Alv* are quoted in *Skáldskaparmál*, stanza 20 and stanza 30, and the two works share an important structural feature. In regards to the section of *Skáldskaparmál* beginning at chapter 2, Faulkes writes that "this part of *Skáldskaparmál* is in conception rather like *Alvíssmál*: both works are concerned with esoteric names and kennings for various concepts, and the narrative framework in both is definitely subsidiary, though the didactic content in both is presented with considerable artistry."[2] *Alv* stanza 20 appears in chapter 59 of *Skáldskaparmál* and *Alv* stanza 30 appears in chapter 63 of *Skáldskaparmál*,[3] although Snorri calls it *Alsvinnsmál*, which means the same thing (i.e., All-wise's Sayings). Because of the great number of poetic kennings and heiti in *Skáldskaparmál* and the *þulur*, it is likely that *Alv* was a source for these texts, and thus *Alv* is probably at least as old as *Snorra Edda*, and most likely older. *Alv* is thirty-five stanzas in total.

When considered as a drama and interpreted in a Ricoeurian framework, *Alv* is a one-act play with three scenes (i.e., three episodes). Scene one is an eight-stanza exchange between Alvíss and Þórr; scene two is a twenty-six-stanza question-and-answer dialogue between Þórr and Alvíss; and, finally, scene three is a single-stanza statement by Þórr that, while it echoes Vafþrúðnir's final stanza of speech in that there is an acknowledgment of his adversary's wisdom, alerts the audience to the success of

Þórr, and thus of the gods, in the contest. In regards to the thematic structure of the poem, Lindow writes that "we may identify three sections: an introductory section of eight stanzas, the exchange proper, stanzas 9–34, and a concluding section of one stanza. In the introductory stanzas, four exchanges take place, each begun by Alvíss and finished by Þórr. The characters name themselves and the stage is set. In the exchange proper, Þórr speaks and Alvíss responds. In the concluding stanza, Þórr speaks, and there is no possibility of a response."[4] The structure of the poem can be divided into the frame and the wisdom dialogue, and like *Vm*, the death of the paranormal adversary of the gods occurs by implication only and away from the main action of the poem. The nature of the dwarf's death is hotly debated, and the present chapter argues that the dwarf is petrified by the sun.

It is important to consider closely the narrative frame of *Alv*, for that is where most of the action takes place, and it is also where the setting of the poem is defined for the audience. Paul Acker writes that "the wisdom portion of the poem is cast in a narrative frame involving risk, as in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. Alvíss is about to carry off Þórr's daughter, apparently having been promised her by the other gods, when Þórr himself returns and challenges him. He will give away his daughter to this pale, corpse-like ogre of a husband only if the dwarf can tell him all he wants to know from all the worlds known in the Old Norse cosmography."[5] In *Vm*, Óðinn seeks out mythological knowledge and is subject to questioning only in order to prove his worth to Vafþrúðnir, who then supplies the wisdom as an exercise in his own confidence. In *Alv*, Þórr, even though on the defensive, for he does not want to lose his daughter to the dwarf, is placed in the position of the questioner, and thus regains control over the situation with how he proposes the dialogue will unfold. Alvíss's early aggressiveness gives way to Þórr's control over the situation. *Snorra Edda* also uses the wisdom dialogue as its main frame for both *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*. In *Gylfaginning* the gods or their representatives Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði are questioned by the visiting Gangleri, who is King Gylfi of Sweden in disguise, and in that narrative the *æsir* also retain control. However, in the case of *Gylfaginning* the whole narrative frame is an illusion devised by Snorri, since Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði are all versions of Óðinn and are questioned by another version of him (i.e., Gangleri; see *Grm* stanza 46 for Gangleri as a *heiti* for Óðinn). The author of *Snorra Edda* may have felt the need for these textual layers in case charges of heathenism were brought against him. If that occurred, he could

defend himself by claiming that the whole narrative is an illusion. In *Skáldskaparmál* the wisdom dialogue is between Bragi and Ægir and neither character is on the offensive or defensive, but the exchange is mutually enlightening. Not only do these frameworks share common features, but there are common features among the myths that are transmitted within them. They all belong to an interlocking mythology that does have divergences and contradictions, but can be read as a closely related group of texts.

Writing specifically about the *Alv* myth, Clunies Ross states that there is a shared,

> general structure for *Alvíssmál* and both Snorri's and Bragi's version of the Hrungnir myth [as presented in Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* and Bragi Boddason's introductory *lausavísa* from *Ragnarsdrápa*]. Þórr is away from Ásgarðr when, because of their vulnerability in their protector's absence, the gods allow an otherworld protector into their hall. He takes advantage of the situation to abduct or threaten to abduct one or more of the gods' women, in all cases including either Þórr's daughter (*Alvíssmál*, Bragi) or his wife (Snorri). Þórr returns to Ásgarðr when this dangerous situation threatens and defeats the predator either by the use of trickery alone or by trickery in combination with brute force.[6]

Þórr tricks Alvíss into keeping their dialogue going until the sun shines into the hall where they are speaking, and thus the myth represented in *Alv* has the representative of the gods not seeking wisdom, but rather using a wisdom dialogue to protect his family. Þórr is most likely not interested in the information that he learns from Alvíss, but we are, as the myth is used to transmit this information to the audience of the poem. Having been put in a difficult situation where his honor is threatened, Þórr uses wisdom to defend himself and the gods.

There is also a connection between *Alv* and *Fjöl*. In *Fjöl* Svipdagr travels to woo a giantess, Menglöð, and must answer a number of questions in order to gain the giantess's hand. Svipdagr, unlike Alvíss, is successful in his bid for his bride, for he, under the name Vindkaldr, asks the giant Fjölsviðr a series of questions that culminate in the question of who may lie with Menglöð. Fjölsviðr declares that Svipdagr is the only one who may lie with Menglöð. Svipdagr then reveals his identity and meets his bride. Another obvious comparison is between *Alv* and *Þrk* and how the gods, Þórr in particular in both of these scenarios, lose something that

they must gain back. In *Þrk* Þórr poses as Freyja in order to gain access to Þrymr and his home so he can retrieve Mjöllnir, which has been stolen from the mighty god. In *Alv*, however, Þórr never loses his daughter, but faces the threat of the loss, and similarly has to act defensively. In order to overcome his adversary Þórr must pose as a seeker of knowledge, which is usually Óðinn's role. There are other myths where members of the *æsir* pose as something or someone they are not. In the myth of Þjazi, for instance, Loki poses as a bird, and also in the myth of the Giant builder Loki poses as a mare.[7] In *Alv* Þórr does not change his shape or his appearance but rather his temperament.

The contents of *Alv* are largely linguistic, rather than cosmological. In the wisdom dialogue Þórr asks Alvíss how the different beings which inhabit the mythological cosmos refer to different phenomena. Lennart Moberg (1914–2005) writes that "the poem's most important and interesting aspect remains obvious enough, i.e. that the poem hinges on the notion of separate languages for gods and other supernatural beings (giants, dwarves, etc.)."[8] The poem provides details for how different beings see the world around them, and how their vision is expressed through language. Moberg continues, stating that "most of the words credited to the gods and other powers are *poetic circumlocutions* of various types."[9] This is interesting, for the words used by men are still the words used in modern Icelandic today. Moberg concludes that "thus in *Alvíssmál* a clear distinction can be seen between the language of men on the one hand and that of the gods and supernatural powers on the other. The difference is principally stylistic: prosaic everyday language *versus* the language of poetry."[10] There has been much critical attention given to the use of language in *Alv*, and thus that is not the focus here, but rather the present objective is to explore the myth of Þórr defending his honor and the honor of the *æsir* as a collective. To do so he must protect his daughter from the dwarf's advances (or perhaps prevent her from entertaining them at all). The result of Þórr's work is the death of the dwarf by sunlight. The myth is not nearly as intricate a composition as *Vm*, but there is still a clearly articulated dramatic structure.[11]

Scene One: The Frame

The first eight stanzas of *Alv* set up the frame story of the narrative. These stanzas of dialogue are essentially a marriage negotiation between a suitor and the father of the bride. The suitor in this case is very aggressive, and

as should be expected the father of the bride shows very little interest in having the suitor as a son-in-law. The beginning of the poem, what I refer to as the first scene, is about marriage.

As with *Vm*, there has been a critical response to *Alv* that attempts to downplay the role of the particular myth represented by the action of the poem within the grand mythological narrative. The argument of the present work is to the contrary. I assert that if we are to take the surviving corpus of eddic poetry as texts belonging to a mythology, then each of the individual stories should be considered as representing a possibly genuine myth. About the myth of Þórr questioning the dwarf, Moberg writes that "it plays a subsidiary part in the poem and is really only an excuse for communicating learning of a mythological-lexicographical nature—evidently the real object of the poem. In this *Alvíssmál* is reminiscent of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*."[12] The myth of Þórr questioning the dwarf, however, is important, and it provides an example of Þórr acting in a knowledge-seeking role, even if only to defend the *æsir* from Alvíss's attack. This role is not characteristic of the god, and may encourage interpreters of Old Norse mythology to reevaluate the common assumption that Þórr is not an intelligent god. He is clearly able to negotiate his way out of a delicate situation, apparently with no help from other gods or goddesses.

The first character we meet in the poem is Alvíss, who has arrived at Ásgarðr and claims something that belongs to the gods. Lindow writes that the dwarf's role in this poem is somewhat peculiar, for "in the context of the manuscript, then, Alvíss the dwarf has usurped the narrative role of the travelling, questing deity, and the inversion could help account for the placing of the poem last among the mythological texts. Þórr's daughter stands in for the precious object sought after. The fact that it is a woman reinforces the Odinic role of Alvíss,"[13] for there are myths that represent Óðinn as a seeker of women (see, e.g., parts of *Háv* and some of the claims made in *Hrbl*). The relation between Alvíss and Óðinn is limited, however, for although able to demonstrate a wide knowledge of words, "his knowledge differs significantly from that of Óðinn or Vafþrúðnir. Alvíss is not a poet but a walking and talking lexicon. His stanzas comprise no more than a catalogue of synonyms, a *þula* or versified list."[14] Similarly, just as Loki usurps the Odinic role of the arriving guest in *Lok*, his failure to succeed in the poem differs from Óðinn's successful quests. Alvíss is not wise like Óðinn, but he may possess knowledge. This is, I think, similar to Vafþrúðnir, who has a vast store of knowledge, but was neither able

to foresee his own death nor to predict the future beyond Ragnarök and the world that will be reborn, and the audience is reminded of this irony through the whole of the poem. In *Alv* this sense of irony is also shared, as the audience can be fairly confident that Þórr will be successful in his bid to protect his daughter.

Even though there is the strong precedent of the gods having much success against their adversaries, Alvíss the dwarf arrives on the scene by claiming his bride, who, we learn, is Þórr's daughter. This is a confident entry for the dwarf, who should know the power of the great Þórr, and the success he has in dealing with adversaries. In the R manuscript poems, Þórr is only got the better of by Óðinn in *Hrbl*. In *Lok* Þórr expels Loki from the feast the gods are having at Ægir's hall, and, as mentioned, in *Þrk* Þórr is successful, with Loki's help this time, in retrieving Mjöllnir. Alvíss, however, is confident in gaining Þórr's daughter, and it appears that the gods have even promised the dwarf that he will receive Þórr's daughter as a bride, albeit this pledge was granted without Þórr's consent. Clunies Ross explains that "although the poem does not give the girl's name, the only daughter of Þórr's who is ever mentioned in Old Norse myth is Þrúðr ('Strength')."[15] She continues, arguing that

> Þórr's daughter Þrúðr is a source of strength to her father and to his society as long as he is able to control her disposal in marriage. Hence the story behind *Alvíssmál* plays on fundamental principles of the Norse mythological system and, given the centrality of Þórr's role as enforcer of proper order in the disposal of women, it is not surprising that a myth about his own attempt to stop a dwarf abducting his daughter would have a certain piquancy to those who appreciated the irony of his situation.[16]

Even though Þórr is most often successful in his challenges with adversaries, the situation set up in the first scene of *Alv* is unique in that Þórr must protect his own daughter. Þrúðr plays no part in the drama, however, as Alvíss is ultimately unsuccessful in getting past Þórr. She is a symbol of what the gods might lose, that is possession of their women, if a dwarf is able to marry Þórr's daughter. Her lack of voice is important to note, for she is presumably never asked for her opinion on the matter of her potential marriage.

Alvíss speaks first, and in so doing, the connection between the dwarf and the inquisitive Óðinn is reinforced. As we remember, Óðinn speaks first in *Vm* in both acts, and in fact he speaks first in all three

scenes of act two. Óðinn is thus the initiator, as is Alvíss in this case. Interestingly, Þórr replies by asking who is the person who calls to him. At this point the audience might be reminded of the opening scene in *Hrbl*, where Þórr initiates the dialogue by calling out to Óðinn, asking who he is. In both poems, during the initial dialogue, Þórr identifies himself as Óðinn's son. Alvíss again takes on the role of the Odinic figure, and Þórr is in his characteristic role of the protector, although the roles are somewhat reversed as the poem progresses; Þórr becomes the aggressor as he presses Alvíss with questions, and Alvíss likewise takes on the role of defender as he responds. After going through the initial negotiation process, during which their identities and intentions are made clear, Alvíss states plainly that he wishes to gain Þórr's consent to marry his daughter. Þórr then sets the stakes of the wisdom contest in stanza 8, declaring that only under one condition will Alvíss leave with his daughter.

> "Meyjar ástum
> muna þér verða,
> vísi gestr, of varit,
> ef þú ór heimi kannt
> hverjum at segja
> allt þat er ek vil vita."
>
> (The love of the girl, wise guest, you won't be refused,
> if you know how to tell me from all the worlds, all that
> I want to know.)

There is no mention of a life or death wager, but only that if Alvíss is unable to answer all of Þórr's questions, he will be deprived of the girl's love. As it turns out, there is more at stake than Alvíss is now aware of, for the confrontation will end in death for the dwarf.

Scene Two: The Wisdom Dialogue

As in *Vm*, the core of *Alv* is a wisdom dialogue in which much mythological information is conveyed, although in *Alv* the mythological information is more about language than the cosmos. Scene two of the one-act drama comprises stanzas 9 through 34. In this central scene Þórr asks a series of questions and Alvíss supplies all of the appropriate answers. Alvíss's role as the Odinic traveler fades once the wisdom dialogue gets underway, and Þórr takes over the Odinic characteristic of the seeker of knowledge.

His first four questions to the dwarf all revolve around the cosmos, not knowledge about them but how they are referred to by the various classes of mythological beings. Óðinn's first four questions to Vafþrúðnir in *Vm* all relate to cosmology, particularly what took place at the beginning of time. Þórr, on the other hand, asks about what the earth, sky, moon, and sun are called. Here the audience knows that Þórr will be victorious, and Alvíss has, as Lindow phrases it, "the role of the doomed Otherworld being" as did Vafþrúðnir.[17] Lindow explains that the categories of Þórr's questions "are cosmogonic (earth, sky, sun, moon) cosmological (clouds, wind, calm, sea), and eschatological (fire, wind, and perhaps a sea doing double duty)."[18] The "double duty" of the sea that Lindow refers to is that perhaps the question about the sea also refers to the moment in the mythological future represented in *Vsp* R stanza 55 and *Vsp* H stanza 49, when the earth sinks into the sea, which invokes the image of Ragnarök, though it is difficult to see any hint of this in the names given to the sea in *Alv* stanza 24. Next, Þórr asks Alvíss about night, and night should be considered as a part of the eschatology, for the earth at Ragnarök will be in darkness as it is during night. After night, Þórr asks Alvíss about seed and beer, traditional topics for wisdom poetry, and fitting in this scenario, especially considering the role that the dwarves played in the creation of the mead of poetry, when the dwarves Fjalar and Galar kill their guest Kvasir and mix his blood with honey to brew the mead. It is while he lists the names for beer that the sun catches up to him, like a party-goer staying up until after dawn, and this may account for why Þórr did not ask Alvíss about the names for day just after he asked about the names for night. If Þórr had asked about the names for day, Alvíss might have become aware of the danger of the approaching day, or, furthermore, perhaps the poet was making a point for the audience that because Þórr did not ask about the names for day, day is on its way. The former option is a clever demonstration of foresight on the part of Þórr; the latter a clever use of foreshadowing on the part of the poet.[19] The final missing question, number fourteen, is about day, the category which causes Alvíss's death.

The languages of the poem that are covered by Alvíss include those of men, the *æsir*, the *vanir*, the giants, the elves, and the dwarves. Mobert explains that "it is striking, and has indeed often been pointed out, that the words attributed to the Vanir all begin with *v* [...] the giants' terms begin with a vowel and therefore alliterate with their name, *iǫtnar*, in ten cases out of thirteen [...] the dwarves' words begin with *d* in five cases out of seven [...] the words of the *æsir*, however, never alliterate with their

name and those of the elves (like those of men) do so only sporadically, almost unintentionally."[20] This alliteration pattern is due to the metrical structure of the poem: "we are dealing with a poem in *ljóðaháttr* and that as far as possible the poet has used a definite sequence for the different beings. Of the six lines of the *ljóðaháttr* stanza the two half-lines alliterate in pairs, while the so-called full lines alliterate internally."[21] For a fine example of a stanza from this scene we can look at stanza 13, when Þórr says the following to Alvíss.

> "Segðu mér þat, Alvíss
> —ǫll of røk fira
> vǫrumk, dvergr, at vitir—
> hversu máni heitir
> sá er menn sjá
> heimi hverjum í."
>
> (Tell me this, All-wise—I reckon, dwarf, that you have
> wisdom about all beings—what the moon is called,
> which men can see, in each world.)

The response Alvíss provides in stanza 14 is as follows.

> "Máni heitir með mǫnnum
> en mýlinn með goðum,
> kalla hverfanda hvél helju í,
> skyndi jǫtnar
> en skin dvergar,
> kalla álfar ártala."
>
> (Moon it's called by men, and ball by the gods, in hell
> it's the whirling wheel, the giants call it the hastener,
> the dwarfs the shiner, elves call it counter of years.)

There is a strong link between the moon stanza in *Alv* and the Mundilfœri stanza in *Vm*. In particular, the name the elves have for the moon, "ártala" ("counter of years"), reminds us that humans have relied on the celestial bodies to keep track of time and this role of the moon is reflected in myths such as this one.

Interestingly, Calvert Watkins writes that "in all cases but two ('sea' and 'grain') the word used by Thor in his question 'how is *x* called' is the ordinary, unmarked 'human' word; the exceptions are introduced for the

sake of alliteration. That the poet saw no contradiction in Thor's using the human word is to be expected, and shows that the metaphor was indeed just a metaphor."[22] The gods are also human, and as will be concluded in the following chapter, the mortality of the gods also shows how they are essentially human.

Scene Three: Lucky Thirteen

In the third and final scene of the one-act *Alv* the narrative frame resumes. In the final verse, stanza 35, after Alvíss has answered thirteen questions, Þórr makes a statement to let the audience know what has taken place on stage.

> Í einu brjósti
> ek sák aldregi
> fleiri forna stafi.
> Miklum tálum
> ek kveð tælden þik:
> Uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr,
> nú skínn sól í sali!
>
> (In one breast I've never seen more ancient
> knowledge; with much guile I declare I've beguiled
> you; day dawns on you now, dwarf, now sun shines in
> the hall.)

It is not stated outright that Alvíss has turned to stone, but it is highly likely. Stanza 31 in *HHv* provides a corroborating example for the death of Alvíss in which the dwarf in question is said to turn into stone.

In the middle of the poem of Helgi Hjörvarðsson there is an exchange of insults between Atli, who is Helgi's companion or lieutenant, and Hrímgerðr, a troll-woman.[23] In stanza 25 of the poem, Hrímgerðr addresses Helgi, who she insists killed her father, stating that as compensation she would like to sleep with the champion for one night. Like Þórr's need to prevent Alvíss from taking away his daughter, Atli needs to prevent Hrímgerðr from sleeping with Helgi. Þórr and Atli seek to maintain the status quo and protect the constructed social order. *HHv* stanza 31 provides us with the important information about Hrímgerðr's death:

> Dagr er nú, Hrímgerðr,
> en þik dvalða hefir
> Atli til aldrlaga;

> hafnar mark
> þykkir hlœgligt vera,
> þars þú í steins líki stendr.
>
> (It's day now, Hrimgerd, Atli has kept you talking until you laid down your life; as a harbour-mark you look hilarious, standing there transformed into stone.)

Here is an instance of a paranormal being turning to stone as a result of being exposed to the light of day. Atli talked Hrímgerðr to death in order to keep her away from the poem's hero, Helgi. This episode may help inform us about what transpires at the end of *Alv*. Þórr keeps Alvíss talking up to the moment of his death in order to keep the dwarf away from his daughter, and like in *HHv*, at the end of *Alv* the threat of Alvíss taking Þrúðr away is no longer present.

Most of the critical commentary concludes that Alvíss turns into stone, and it is the present interpretation that this is the case. Ármann Jakobsson forwards that "in *Alvíssmál*, Þórr simply keeps on asking the dwarf questions until the sun rises and the dwarf (presumably) turns to stone," with the reservation that "*Alvíssmál* is the sole source for dwarfs turning into stone at daybreak—if that is indeed what Alvíss does, as the poem does not specify stone."[24] Þórr keeps Alvíss talking up to the moment of his death. At the end of the poem the threat of Alvíss taking away the daughter of Þórr is no longer present, and the most likely conclusion is that the dwarf has been petrified. Clunies Ross adds, on the likelihood of the sun being able to turn Alvíss into stone, that "in the Old Norse mythological world, as in many more modern European systems of thought, beings designated as evil cannot bear the sun's rays,"[25] and that in relation to *Alv*, "the contest is really one of wit and cunning rather than encyclopedic knowledge. Þórr has no intention of giving his daughter to Alvíss nor would the poem's medieval audience have expected him to as the situation clearly breaks the societal ground rules. The test of knowledge is a ruse to distract Alvíss and keep him talking until daybreak. The way in which Þórr frames his questions is designed in part to avoid reminding the dwarf of his susceptibility to sunlight while keeping his vulnerability in the audience's mind."[26] Alvíss is threatening the gods in this poem, and due to the allegiance between the gods and humans, and thus between the audience and the gods, Alvíss can be seen as evil or at least as an enemy of gods. The audience would always identify more easily with the *æsir* and be able to sympathize with the fear or anxiety they feel when there is a threat

from the outside, whether the threat comes from giants, dwarves, or some other kind of paranormal other. Þórr as the protector of the gods further increases our sympathies for his cause. The conclusion of the poem is very similar to *Vm*: the gods as represented by one of their most prominent members outwit the supernatural opponent. In *Alv*, Þórr is able to defend his family and keep the paranormal dwarf from taking his daughter away from him, and thus from having the *æsir* lose one of their precious (and guarded) females.

Alv is thus easily divisible into three scenes, beginning with an introduction and negotiation that constitutes the frame, followed by the exchange of information, and concluding with the death of the dwarf. As the dwarf dies, the poem concludes, and the divine society of the gods remains safe from the threat of the intruder. The action of the poem can be considered an individual and coherent myth of Þórr defending the gods, in this case through the symbol of his daughter. The poem also functions as a vessel in which poetic knowledge is transmitted to the audience, knowledge of mythological language, and it importantly confirms for us that different groups of mythological beings were thought to use different languages. In *Alv* there is less of a focus on death as it will come to the gods than in *Vm*, but more of a focus on how the gods can deliver death to their adversaries.

With the conclusion of *Alv*, the mythological section of the R manuscript is also concluded. The early Odinic poems were frightening in their focus on the coming of Ragnarök and how the pursuit of knowledge serves to confirm one's eventual death. The later poems that focus on Þórr are more reassuring, in the sense that through active creativity society can be kept safe from outside threat at least for the time being. With this sense of safety the mythological section of R concludes. Lindow writes that "when the sun shines in and petrifies the dwarf, it also petrifies the mythological section, fixes it, and allows distance from it."[27] Óðinn opens the mythological section of R listening to the *völva* recite the vast narrative of *Vsp* that spans time and space and Þórr closes it engaged with a dwarf in the focused narrative of *Alv* that is relatively short in duration and takes place all in the home of the gods. In this way the mythological poems are finely balanced. Lindow argues that "the mythology required both Óðinn and Þórr, and the myths were ways of comparing them and their attributes, abilities, and spheres of influence. Snorri, steeped in the older poetry, and the redactor of the Codex Regius, also obviously a person interested in poetry, ranked Óðinn first but the myths themselves

suggest a more complex relationship and often give Þórr the last word."[28] The manuscript is intricately entwined with its narratives and accordingly reflects its contents. One might suggest that *Alv*, coming at the end of the mythological section of R, is even "anti-Odinic" in that it suggests that esoteric mythological knowledge is worse than useless when confronted with tactical common sense.

Ármann Jakobsson, on the relation of *Þrk*, *Vkv*, and *Alv*, the final three poems of the mythological section of R, states that unlike the other two poems, narratives that show us a giant and an elf engaged in the action, "*Alvíssmál*, however, is not a story at all. It has a frame narrative but the poem itself does not concern the dwarf at all but his knowledge of foreign languages, an accomplishment that not only encapsulates dwarfs but other diverse beings, including elves and giants."[29] Even though there is a frame narrative, which is the focus of the present chapter, more important to the ethos of the poem is the dwarf's knowledge of languages. The knowledge that Alvíss displays is not like the knowledge that Óðinn possesses, but is more categorical.

Thus, when comparing *Vm* and *Alv* it is apparent that the two texts share much in common. In both poems, it is made clear that the gods are wise and their supernatural counterparts are knowledgeable. Óðinn handily outwits Vafþrúðnir and Þórr does the same to Alvíss. Wisdom and knowledge are thus not the same thing. On this distinction, Frye professes that "knowledge is of the particular and actual, and wisdom is rather a sense of the potential, of the way to deal with the kind of thing that may happen."[30] Vafþrúðnir and Alvíss may be full of information, but neither can foresee the future, and as a result of their lack of wisdom, they both perish at the hands of the gods. The gods, even though they know they will die, are unable to prevent their demise. They must prepare for the end but they cannot prevent it.

NOTES

1 Clunies Ross, "Þórr's Honour," pp. 48–76.
2 Faulkes, introduction to *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. xviii.
3 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, p. 90 and p. 99.
4 Lindow, "Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods," p. 296.
5 Acker, "Dwarf-lore in *Alvíssmál*," p. 213.
6 Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1:115.
7 Acker, "Dwarf-lore in *Alvíssmál*," pp. 217–18.

[8] Moberg, "The Languages of *Alvíssmál*," p. 301.

[9] Ibid., p. 304.

[10] Ibid., p. 307.

[11] For an extensive analysis of the language in *Alv* see Güntert, *Von der Sprache der Götter und Geister*, pp. 130–60.

[12] Moberg, "Languages of *Alvíssmál*," p. 299.

[13] Lindow, "Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods," p. 294.

[14] Ibid., p. 296.

[15] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1:111.

[16] Ibid., p. 112.

[17] Lindow, "Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods," p. 297.

[18] Ibid., p. 298.

[19] Jan de Vries, "Om Eddaens Visdomsdigtning," p. 9; see also Klingenberg, "Alvíssmál. Das Lied vom überweisen Zwerg," pp. 113–42.

[20] Moberg, "Languages of *Alvíssmál*," pp. 311–12.

[21] Ibid., p. 312.

[22] Watkins, "Language," p. 3.

[23] In stanza 14 and stanza 17 of *HHv* Atli calls Hrímgerðr a "fála", which the Íslenzk fornrit editors define as "tröllkona", Zoëga defines as "giantess, hag, witch," and Carolyne Larrington translates as "troll-woman." In stanza 18, Hrímgerðr states that she descends from Hati, a *jötunn*, or giant.

[24] Ármann Jakobsson, "The Hole," p. 61.

[25] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1:113.

[26] Ibid., pp. 113–14.

[27] Lindow, "Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods," pp. 300–301.

[28] Ibid., p. 303.

[29] Ármann Jakobsson, "The Hole," p. 57.

[30] Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 154.

Chapter Eight

Closing Time

IT IS IMPORTANT TO study the cultural heritage of the past. Through the interpretation of the stories, the art, the architecture, and more that survives from antiquity and the medieval period it is possible to learn about ways of thinking that are prior to our own and have also deeply influenced us. Furthermore, it also places us in a position to interpret the use of cultural heritage by groups in the present, and in some cases this means interpreting instances of cultural appropriation, but not always. Lévi-Strauss speaks about what perception may mean from a point of view other than our own. About how a mythology can explain almost anything through the use of metaphor, he argues,

> so this totalitarian ambition of the savage mind is quite different from the procedures of scientific thinking. Of course, the great difference is that this ambition does not succeed. We are able, through scientific thinking, to achieve mastery over nature—I don't need to elaborate that point, it is obvious enough—while, of course, myth is unsuccessful in giving man more material power over the environment. However, it gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe. It is, of course, only an illusion.[1]

What has been lost in the present day is the illusion that Lévi-Strauss speaks about and its accompanying beauty. With gained scientific knowledge there is an increase in technology and mastery over nature (even to the point of destruction), but there is also a loss of the perception that the universe can be explained through a mythology. Although *Vm* is a thirteenth-century text that may have roots in pre-Christian times, it is not pagan itself. Along with its pre-Christian influences it demonstrates the influences of Christianity. By analyzing the narrative as closely as possible, we have learned about the form of the poem itself, about the society from which it stems, and about some of the most important modern critical interpretations of the poem, and of its parts.

The task of the present work has been to treat *Vm* with a close and contextual reading that considers the poem as a drama that might have been performed in the medieval period in Iceland, an assumption that is based primarily on the work of Gunnell, and the same approach has also been taken to *Alv* in shortened form. This narrative interpretation has been grounded in the temporal theory of Ricoeur, and as such the primary issue that must be addressed at the conclusion of this work is whether the narrative theory of Ricoeur is appropriate for application to an eddic text such as *Vm*, and if it may also be possible to apply such narrative theory to other medieval Icelandic texts, dramatic or epic. Only some of the many possible avenues for interpretation have been explored, as it would have been possible to draw from a large body of other comparative sources, such as the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, a work that treats many of the same characters in similar and dissimilar storylines, or even more works from the medieval Icelandic canon. By choosing to read other mythological texts with *Vm*, namely *Snorra Edda* and other eddic poems including *Alv*, a context has been chosen and constructed for *Vm*, and less so for *Alv*.

Taking a closer look at the results of the interpretation, one important question to address is the nature of Óðinn's motivations in *Vm*. If Óðinn's goal was to confirm that he will die at Ragnarök and then to kill Vafþrúðnir, he is decidedly victorious and has accomplished the task he set out to complete when he left Ásgarðr. As a result of his journey both the god and the audience are reminded that although Óðinn is divine, he is not immortal. This is echoed in Þórr's use of the human terms for phenomena he asks Alvíss about in *Alv*, and further reinforced by the movement from poems about the gods to poems about human characters after the conclusion of *Alv* in the R manuscript, the primary medieval manuscript of eddic poetry. The mortality of the gods is perhaps emphasized even more because the poems as they survive belong to the Christian culture of thirteenth-century Iceland, and by that time in Iceland the divinity of the Norse pantheon was being actively undermined to emphasize Christian values. It is also likely that the gods were always mortal, for there are surviving examples of pre-Christian sculptures that represent Óðinn's death (see, e.g., the Ledberg Stone from Sweden).[2] The divinity of the Norse pantheon is thus limited, and even though they defeat their enemies in the mythological present, they perish in the mythological future. All of the Norse deities from the older generation die at Ragnarök in sources that deal with the eschatological myth, as did belief in them

during the early centuries of Icelandic settlement. The theme of the death of the older generation of gods is an utterly human theme. Death is a feature of life that no one can escape, but a new generation will always follow in the footsteps of their ancestors.

Vafþrúðnir dies at the end of *Vm* and Alvíss dies at the end of *Alv*, but these are not events that occur within the action of the poems. Rather the audience must deduce that these deaths take place after the action concludes. One major unknown for the audience of *Vm* is the manner of Vafþrúðnir's death. Does the knowledgeable giant take his own life, or does the unmasked Óðinn overpower and kill him? Vafþrúðnir may just vanish as do the words of the poem, his existence washed away with no trace other than the poem itself. There is no world of gods and giants outside of the extant texts, so the proposition that Vafþrúðnir does vanish once the action of the poem concludes is the truest answer, and in that sense the Óðinn of *Vm* vanishes too. It might also be assumed, taking liberty with conjecture and the addition of narratives, that after Óðinn's victory over Vafþrúðnir the god returns to Ásgarðr and to his wife Frigg. In the prose introduction to *Grm*, the next poem after *Vm* in both the R and A manuscripts, Óðinn and Frigg are once again found together in Ásgarðr, this time on Hliðskjálf, engaged in another discussion that precedes Óðinn's departure from the home of the gods.

Vm is more than an "empty vessel" or narrative framework to which a poet at some point in the medieval North added the details of the poem as we now have it, and the same is true for *Alv*. These are important myths which provide us with details of actions made by gods that are important for any fully informed study of the mythology as a whole. This assertion is supported by the preceding analysis of the intricate structures of the poems, both of which match closely with the contents of the poems and with the picture of the mythological cycle. This is particularly true for *Vm*. By giving such close and detailed attention to the poem, and ultimately concluding that the structure of the poem mirrors its content, I conclude that it can be considered to be a representation of a myth that may once have been a part of an active and living mythology, and as such the surviving poem is itself a pre-Christian influence on Old Norse poetry.

Larrington writes that "Vafþrúðnir's defeat in the poem mimics the defeat of the giants in Time despite their priority in the universe; it is a defeat which Vafþrúðnir is forced to admit."[3] This statement is important for our conclusion to the discussion of how *Vm* can be read in its mythological context because, as Óðinn defeats Vafþrúðnir, it is also the gods

who will prevail in the mythological cycle, with members of the younger generation surviving Ragnarök. Þórr's defeat of Alvíss supports this thematic conclusion. Although many of the gods will be defeated or at least killed by the giants at Ragnarök, there are gods who will survive, those from the younger generation in the conflicting accounts from *Vsp* and *Vm*. There is no clear or particular mention of any giants who will survive. We know that Fenrir will be killed by Óðinn's son Víðarr, the Miðgarðsormr will be killed by Þórr, and Loki will be killed by Heimdallr. Several of the major battles at Ragnarök, as can be seen, will be mutually destructive in the same manner that the great battles and wars that plague history are also mutually destructive. What is interesting about the Norse gods, however, is that they do not all perish, but are given a second chance in a new age, the younger generation at least. Like in *Vsp*, the mythological information in *Vm* is encouraging and hopeful. Violence was pervasive in medieval Iceland, as it is today in the world generally, but the actions that are made in the present do not need to plague the future for the children of the next generation. It can be said that violence never produces good, except perhaps when it is incurred to prohibit further violence. At the current moment in history, now in the twenty-first century, this kind of hope is important.

In the Ragnarök phase of the mythological cycle and immediately after, there is a reversal of fortune for the giants. Throughout the mythological present the trend is that the gods most often get the better end of the deal in their interactions with giants, highlighted, for example, by Óðinn's victory over Vafþrúðnir. As Ragnarök approaches the greatest misfortune to befall the gods, the death of Baldr occurs and the giants begin to take back some of the ground they have lost in their struggles against the inhabitants of Ásgarðr. The descendants of the gods who survive Ragnarök demonstrate the ultimate superiority of the gods both in time, in that they live on into the next generation, and space, in that they occupy the world after it is reborn. The mythological cycle thus has a double reversal, from favoring the gods, then the giants, and once again the gods, whose legacy survives with the continuation of the younger generation in the new world. The new beginning that the gods receive in the renewed world indicates perseverance of the pre-Christian dimension of temporality, which emphasizes renewal (as we have seen in the theories of Gurevich and Eliade), that was being replaced by the more linear dimension of temporality of the Christian theological system that spread through the North during the medieval period. In this manner two conceptions of

temporality coexist in *Vm*: the pre-Christian and the Christian. The evidence of belief in the second generation of gods does not mean that there is evidence for belief in an endless repetition of rise and fall of the gods, so even the cyclical element of the narratives of Old Norse mythology is limited, and that may have always been the case.

Treating *Vm* in its mythological context proves to be challenging because although it is possible to situate the poem in mythical time in relation to other well-known myths that occur in the temporal framework of the mythological cycle, namely in relation to the creation period, the death of Baldr, Ragnarök, and the subsequent rebirth, there still remains the fact that in no other source is it possible to find any reference to Óðinn's visit to Vafþrúðnir's hall. This leaves the distinct possibility that rather than being a representation of a myth, as I conclude *Vm* is, due to the intricacy with which its form and content are both woven together and mirror one another, the poem still lends itself to the possibility of being an independent narrative, a wisdom dialogue intended to store and transmit mythological knowledge, but not a myth that was believed to have happened. If this is the case, *Vm* is still an example of a traditional mythological pattern. The same possibility must be acknowledged for *Alv*. McKinnell argues for this as a strong possibility for *Vm*, and Ruggerini has stated exactly this:

> this kind of dialogue is therefore not part of mythic narrative, but of a literary episode which uses mythological schemes and characters. In other words the wisdom debate between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir is a thematic nucleus in itself, but one which could be varied, for example as to the number of questions and perhaps even their content; from a certain point of view, this can also be seen as a formulaic narrative structure. The poet was not elaborating a pre-existing myth about a specific occasion on which Óðinn, beset by doubts about whether or not to visit a wise but fearsome giant, sought advice from his wife Frigg and then decided on the journey and defeated Vafþrúðnir in a wisdom contest, with the myth ending in the giant's death.[4]

The same statement could also be made about *Grm*, for that matter, and it may be possible, due to the late nature of the source material, to deconstruct the whole mythological corpus in such a fashion. Like *Vm*, *Grm* is a poem in which the primary result of the action is the elucidation of mythological information, and in both cases mythological knowledge is transmitted to an audience internal to the narrative—for example, the characters engaged in the dialogues, and an audience external to the narratives—for example, the

medieval Icelandic audience (and now modern audiences throughout the world). The frameworks of both poems are independent of the mythological cycle, and, for example, *Snorra Edda* does not make reference to either of the narratives in terms of being mythological events worth recounting, but references them as sources of knowledge in *Gylfaginning*. That said, however, both poems are primarily Óðinn poems, and they do not necessarily require parallel reference or corroboration in the sources of Old Norse mythology to be considered representations of myths. They survive as mythical representations, and that is what counts most, for they are impressions of the past. Treating *Vm* as a myth, in other words, is one of the intended contributions of this work to the critical discourse, and the brief treatment of *Alv* demonstrates that a more thorough analysis of that poem could reach a similar conclusion if the reader is not yet convinced.

The present study of *Vm* aims further and hopes to inform our modern understanding of the Old Norse mythological cosmos on two more crucial points. Firstly, as is well accepted, the poem is an important source of information pertaining to Norse cosmology. The knowledge revealed in the dialogue describes events in the mythic past, the mythic present, and also foretells some key events that will transpire in the mythic future that lead up to, include, and even follow Ragnarök. *Vm*, along with *Vsp*, *Grm*, and *Gylfaginning*, draws a history of the mythological cosmos that might have been well known during the pagan period in Scandinavia and Iceland, although with different understandings than what now survives, as the surviving sources often do not agree with each other, so it is more than likely that those which have not survived would have added to the variation. It is possible to view the pagan cosmos as portrayed in *Vm* both independently and in conjunction with the surviving sources, and this study has attempted to do both simultaneously: that is, to draw the image of the cosmos as it is presented in *Vm* through the close reading and to combine it with other Old Norse mythological sources to form a composite image. This approach, of close reading in conjunction with contextual reading, has highlighted some important textual issues, and could possibly lead to a wider study focusing on all four of these sources. In the case of *Alv*, a more extensive study could be carried out that considers the other Þórr poems and *Gylfaginning* along with *Skáldskaparmál*.

Secondly, and just as significantly, when *Vm* is considered as a representation of a myth—the story of Óðinn meeting with Frigg and then leaving Ásgarðr to travel to the hall of Vafþrúðnir—the implications of its action further add to the whole understanding of the mythological

cycle. This story, like the myth of Baldr's death or any other major event represented in the sources, is situated within the cosmological history that is contested in the poem's central dialogue between the god and the giant. *Vm* foreshadows the end of the older generation of the gods and the eradication of the giants, and as such the poem is an example of the cosmos looking in on itself in self-reflection and it is in fact microcosmic. As stated at the outset of this book, within the narrative frame of the poem the cosmos is represented in miniature. In *Vm* the giant loses the contest that his guest initiates or tricks him into initiating, and Óðinn is assured of his own impending death at Ragnarök with the answer Vafþrúðnir provides in stanza 53. The giant has lived a long life (or lives), remembering far into the past, and Óðinn is also extremely old, and he already knows he will not live forever. Neither player can put off death forever. The poem demonstrates that the eddic gods are fated to die, as are humans, even though their lifespan is long and its contents paranormal. This is significant, for it demonstrates that the paranormal must eventually succumb to the natural forces of life. In the end the gods die as humans do, and paganism fades in the light and shadows of Christianity. Medieval Icelanders found it important to transmit these myths about pre-Christian gods that ultimately reflect the futility of the paranormal when it is faced with the normal, the supernatural with the natural. There are issues that announce themselves when narratives from the Old Norse mythological sources are read together as a "coherent" mythology, but I hope that at each instance where such "addition" has taken place in the interpretation, which has allowed for the concept of cosmos and microcosm to be considered fully, it is being done in a critical and self-reflective manner. It is a human impulse to add information together, and being aware of such an impulse brings us one step closer to understanding its origin.

The representation of the human condition in literary texts is a quality that is common to many ages of storytelling in societies, whether ancient, medieval, or modern. Eliade writes the following: "at all levels of human experience, however ordinary, archetypes still continue to give meaning to life and to create 'cultural values': the paradise of modern novels and the isle of Camoens are as significant culturally as any of the isles of medieval literature."[5] And, at a different time, Eliade touches a note that is at the heart of the present work: "history is thus abolished, not through consciousness of living an eternal present, nor by means of a periodically repeated ritual—it is abolished in the future. Periodic regeneration of the Creation is replaced by a single regeneration that will take place in an *in*

illo tempore to come."[6] Each time *Vm* or any of the other Norse cosmogonic sources are read, either aloud or in silence, the cosmological cycle that is recounted and foretold repeats itself. In this manner, the possible pre-Christian belief system that is represented in a poem's contents continues to live into the present, to influence us now, continuing into an age when there is no continual cycle of regeneration other than the New Year, although each year is dated consecutively, but a supposed single regeneration in the unknown future after the Day of Judgment. For a medieval audience, these two conflicting notions, the linear and the cyclical, met in the Old Norse mythological materials, and particularly in the eddic poems that relate stories of the Norse pantheon. In sum, the conflicting notions ultimately meet in the single regeneration that has replaced the cyclical repetition. The younger generation of the gods will inhabit the world that is reborn, but the generation after them, if there is one, may not be so lucky.

In the present day, in particular in the West, widespread belief in the doctrines of Christianity is waning, the secular age is gaining ground, and a return to the literary remnants of the distant past that have survived for us through the medium of Christian manuscript culture is most welcome. Through the study of mythology humankind can understand more about the world in which we live, and whether the information that is presented to us is true or not in terms of explanatory value for the natural world, it can tell us something about how humans in the past have perceived the world and perhaps even sought to discover their own place in it. The study of mythology is an exercise in interpretation. In our specific case, as it pertains to the present book, it is possible to conclude that in thirteenth-century Iceland Christians were still interested in the pre-Christian past, and this work is involved in the critical practice of interpreting medieval Iceland's preservation of its own past. The medieval interest in the past manifested in the reinterpretation and perhaps even the invention of pagan myths in the form of eddic poetry along with prose works such as *Snorra Edda*. In these sources a hybrid understanding of temporality is identifiable, indicating that while a general understanding of time as linear had been integrated into the representation of the mythological cycle in the sources, the individual pieces of mythical information in *Vm* reveal at least an acknowledgment of Eliade's eternal return and Gurevich's interpretation of agrarian societies as being subject to the influence of the natural exposure to the sun, the moon, and the seasons. Finally, Ricoeur's important assertion that narrative is a primary source for understanding

temporality could not be more true than when *Vm* is considered, for, as mentioned, the cyclical dimension is represented in the mythical information and perseveres in the single regeneration illustrated in the world reborn, but ultimately the poem profoundly recognizes the task for those existing in the present as one that carries the weight of the past in preparation for the future. Óðinn has as his primary task in *Vm* to confirm that he will die at Ragnarök, and Þórr has as his role in *Alv* the protection of the homestead. In the sources Óðinn only ever hears about his future death as inevitably taking place in the jaws of Fenrir the wolf. He must spend his time anticipating his eventual fall. Now in the present we all also know that we will die, but we can, like our protagonist, prepare for the end, and the study of the past is the best way to prepare for the future. This has been, now ends, and will remain, a narrative study of *Vafþrúðnismál*.

Notes

[1] Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, p. 17.
[2] Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, p. 78.
[3] Larrington, "Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography," p. 67.
[4] Ruggerini, "Stylistic and Typological Approach," p. 156.
[5] Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 433.
[6] Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, pp. 111–12.

"This page intentionally left blank"

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Alfræði íslenzk: Islandsk encyklopædisk litteratur. Cod. Mbr. AM. 194, 8vo, vol. 1. Edited by Kristian Kålund. Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur. Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1908.

Bergbúa þáttr. Edited by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. *Harðar saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 13. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991.

Codex Trajectinus: The Utrecht Manuscript of the Prose Edda. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile 15. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1985.

De Codex Trajectinus van de Snorra Edda. Edited by Willem van Eeden Jr. Leiden: Eduard Ijdo, 1913.

De Gamle Eddadigte. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932.

Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen. Edited by Ernst Kock. 2 vols. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946–49.

Die Edda mit historisch-kritischem Commentar. Edited by R. C. Boer. 2 vols. Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1922.

Edda Islandorum. Völuspá. Hávamál. P.H. Resen's Editions of 1665. In *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, vol. 2. Edited by Anthony Faulkes Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1977.

Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1931.

Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda. Collectio carminum veterum scaldorum Sæmundiana dicta. Edited by Rasmus Christian Rask. Stockholm: Typis Elmenianis, 1818.

Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda. Edda rhythmica seu antiqvior, vulgo Sæmundina dicta. Ex codice Bibliotecæ Regiæ Hafniensis pergameno, necnon diversis Legati Arnæ-Magnæni et aliorum membraneis chartaceisqve melioris notæ manuscriptis. Cum interpretation Latina, lectionibus variis, notis, glossario vocum et indice rerum. Edited by Guðmundur Magnæus, Jón Johnsonius, Jón Ólafsson, Finnur Magnússon, and Gunnar Palsson. 3 vols.

Introduction to vol. 1 and vol. 2 by Skúli Þ. Thorlacius and Børge Thorlacius. Copenhagen : Legati Magnæani, 1787–1828.

Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróða. The Edda of Sæmund the Learned. From the Old Norse or Icelandic. Translated by Benjamin Thorpe. Part 1. London: Trübner, 1866.

Edda. Die lieder des codex regius nebst verwandten denkmälern, I: Text. Edited by Gustav Neckel editions 1–3. Revised by Hans Kuhn editions 4–5. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1914, 1926, 1936, 1962, 1983.

Eddadigte. Edited by Jón Helgason. Vol. 1 (1962): *Vǫluspá. Hávamál*, 2nd edition. Vol. 2 (1952): *Gudedigte*. Vol. 3 (1959): *Heltedigte. Første del*. Nordisk Filologi: Tekster og lærebøger til universitetsbrug. Series A: Texts. Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, 1952–62.

Eddica Minora. Dichtungen eddischer Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosawerken. Edited by Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch. Dortmund: Druck und Verlag von Fr. Wilh. Ruhfus, 1903.

Eddukvæði. Edited by Gísli Sigurðsson. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1998.

Eddukvæði: Goðakvæði and *Hetjukvæði*. Edited by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2014.

Eddukvæði (Sæmundar-Edda). Edited by Guðni Jónsson. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949.

Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore. Translated by Andy Orchard. London: Penguin, 2011.

Forsøg til en Oversættelse af Sæmunds Edda. Translated by Bertel Christian Sandvig. 2 vols. Copenhagen, 1783–85.

Håndskriftet Nr. 2365 4to g. kgl. Samling. på det store kgl. bibliothek i København (Codex regius af den ældre Edda) *i fototypisk og diplomatisk gengivelse*. Edited by Ludv. F. A. Wimmer and Finnur Jónsson. Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur. Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1891.

Handskriftet Nr. 748 4to, bl. 1-6, i den Arna-magnænske samling (brudstykke af den ældre Edda) *i fototypisk og diplomatisk gengivelse*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur. Copenhagen: S. L. Mollers Bogtrykkeri, 1896.

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks. Edited by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 1. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan forni, 1943.

Konungsbók eddukvæða = Codex Regius: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gl.Kgl.Sml 2365 4to. Edited by Vésteinn Ólason and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson. Reykjavík: Lögberg and Edda, 2001.

Norræn fornkvæði: Islandsk Samling af folkelige Oldtidsdigte om Nordens Guder og Heroer almindelig kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða. Edited by Sophus Bugge. Christiania: P. T. Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1867.

Poetic Edda. Translated by Carolyne Larrington. Revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Saga of King Heidrek the Wise. Edited and translated by Christopher Tolkien. *Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960.

Saga of the Ynglings. Translated by Lee M. Hollander. *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*. Austin: University of Texas, 1964.

Snorri Sturluson. *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005.

———. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál.* Edited by Anthony Faulkes. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998.

———. *The Prose Edda*. Translated by Jesse Byock. London: Penguin, 2005.

Sæmundar Edda. Mit einem Anhang. Edited by F. Detter and R. Heinzel. 2 vols: text and commentary. Leipzig: G. Wigand, 1903.

Sæmundar-Edda. Eddukvæði. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1905.

Tale of the Mountain-Dweller. Translated by Marvin Taylor. *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, 2:444–48. Edited by Viðar Hreinsson. Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997.

Uppsala-Edda: Handritið DG 11 4to. Edited by Heimir Pálsson. Reykjavík and Reykholt: Bókaútgáfan opna and Snorrastofa í Reykholti, 2013.

Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to. Edited by Heimir Pálsson and translated by Anthony Faulkes. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012.

Vafþrúðnismál. Edited by Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín. *Vafthrudnismal sive odarum Eddæ Sæmundinæ una. Quam ex cod. membr. Biblioth. Regiæ cum versione latina, varietate lectionum, notis philologic-criticis, indiceqve vocum pro stipendio Communitatis Regiæ opponentium examine sistit Grimus Johannis Thorkelin defendente ... Thorarino Sigv. Liliendahl.* Copenhagen: A. F. Stern, 1779.

Vafþrúðnismál. Edited by Tim William Machan, 2nd ed. Durham and Toronto: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (i.e. 'Medieval and Renaissance Studies') at Durham University and the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 2008. First published in 1988 by Durham Medieval Texts.

Ynglinga saga. Edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. *Heimskringla*, vol. 1. Íslenzk fornrit 26. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1941.

Secondary Sources

Acker, Paul. "Dwarf-lore in *Alvíssmál*." In *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, edited by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, pp. 213–27. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Andersson, Theodore M. "Beyond Epic and Romance: *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*." In *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 65th*

birthday, 26th May 1986, edited by Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, pp. 1–11. Philologica Germanica 8. Wien: Hermann Bölhaus, 1986.

———. "The Lays in the Lacuna of *Codex Regius*." In *Specvlvm Norroenvm: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, edited by Ursula Dronke, Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Gerd Wolfgang Weber, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, pp. 6–26. Odense: Odense University Press, 1981.

Aristotle. *De Poetica (Poetics)*. Translated by Ingram Bywater. In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon, pp. 1453–87. New York: Random House, 1941.

Ármann Jakobsson. "A Contest of Cosmic Fathers: God and Giant in Vafþrúðnismál." *Neophilologus* 92 (2007): 263–77.

———. "Enter the Dragon: Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero." In *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, edited by Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay, pp. 33–52. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010.

———. "'Er Saturnús er kallaðr en vér köllum Frey': The Roman Spring of the Old Norse Gods." In *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North*, edited by Leszek P. Słupecki and Jakub Morawiec, pp. 158–64. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzesowskiego, 2009.

———. "Loki og jötnarönir." In *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum*, edited by Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Árni Sigurjónsson, Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, Guðrún Nordal, and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, pp. 31–41. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2009.

———. "Óðinn as Mother: The Old Norse Deviant Patriarch." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 126 (2011): 5–16.

———. "The Hole: Problems in Medieval Dwarfology." *Arv* 61 (2005): 53–76.

———. "Where Do the Giants Live?" *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 121 (2006): 101–12.

Bagge, Sverre. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's* Heimskringla. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Barthes, Roland. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." In *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, pp. 79–124. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

Bartholin, Thomas. *Antiquitatum danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres*. Copenhagen: Bockenhoffer, 1689.

Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir. "Gunnlogi and Hræfrakki: Two Ditties in the Shorter Version of The Saga of Gísli." Translated by Elísabet Snorradóttir. In *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference, Bonn/Germany, 28th July–2nd August 2003*, edited by Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer, pp. 34–39. Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003.

Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Introduction to *Heimskringla*, vol. 1. Íslenzk fornrit 26, pp. v–cxl. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1941.

Björn Magnússon Ólsen. "Til Eddakvadene III: Til Vafþrúðnismál." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 38 (1922): 195–6.

Boer, R. C. *Die Edda: mit historisch-Kritischem commentar*, vol. 2. Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1922.

Bogel, Frederic V. *New Formalist Criticism: Theory and Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Bonnetain, Yvonne S. *Der nordgermanische Gott Loki aus literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive*. Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 2006.

Borst, Arno. *Medieval Worlds: Barbarians, Heretics and Artists in the Middle Ages*. Translated by Eric Hansen. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Bugge, Sophus. Introduction to *Norræn fornkvæði: Islandsk Samling af folkelige Oldtidsdigte om Nordens Guder og Heroer almindelig kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða*. Christiania: P. T. Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1867.

———. *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, vol. 1. Christiania: A. Cammermeyer, 1881–89.

———. *The Home of The Eddic Poems*. Translated by William Henry Schofield. London: David Nutt in the Strand, 1899.

Byatt, A. S. *Ragnarok: The End of the Gods*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Metaphor as Myth and as Religion*. New York: Alfred van der Marck Editions, 1985.

Ciklamini, Marlene. "Óðinn and the Giants." *Neophilologus* 46 (1962): 145–58.

———. "The Chronological Conception in Norse Mythology." *Neophilologus* 47 (1963): 138–51.

Cleasby, Richard and Gudbrand Vigfusson. *Icelandic-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874.

Clover, Carol. "*Hárbarðsljóð* as Generic Farce." *Scandinavian Studies* 51.2 (1979): 124–45.

Clunies Ross, Margaret. *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*. Vol. 1: *The Myths*. Vol. 2: *The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*. The Viking Collection 7, 10. Odense: Odense University Press, 1994–98.

———. *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's* ars poetica *and Medieval Theories of Language*. The Viking Collection 4. Odense: Odense University Press, 1987.

———. "The Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, pp. 12–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

———. "Voice and Voices in Eddic Poetry." In *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Preprints of The Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4–10*

September 1988, edited by Teresa Pàroli, pp. 219–30. Spoleto: Centro Italiano de Studi sull' Alto Medioevo, 1988.

———. "Why Skaði Laughed: Comic Seriousness in an Old Norse Mythic Narrative." *Maal og Minne* (1989, 1–2): 1–14.

———. "Þórr's Honour." In *Studien zum Altgermanischen*, *Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, edited by Heiko Uecker. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 11, pp. 48–76. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994.

Dieterle, Richard L. "The Song of Baldr." *Scandinavian Studies* 58.3 (1986): 285–307.

Dronke, Ursula. Introduction to *The Poetic Edda, Heroic Poems*, vol. 1, pp. xi–xiii. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

Dumézil, Georges. *Loki*. Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1948.

Eedden Jr., Willem van. Introduction to *De Codex Trajectinus van de Snorra Edda*, pp. i–cxxvi and pp. 3–7. Leiden: Eduardo Ijdo, 1913.

Einar Pálsson. *Rammislagur*. Reykjavík: Mímir, 1978.

Einar G. Pétursson. "Eddur á 17. öld." In *Snorrastefna 25. – 27. júli 1990*, edited by Úlfar Bragason, pp. 19–34. Reykjavík: Stofnun Sigurðar Nordals, 1992.

———. *Eddurit Jóns Guðmundssonar lærða: Samantektir um skilning á Eddu og að fornu í þeirri gömlu norrænu kölluðust rúnir bæði ristingar og skrifelsi. Þættir úr fræðasögu 17. aldar*. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1998.

———. *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld.* Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1962.

Ejder, Bertil. "Eddadikten Vafþrúðnismál." *Vetenskaps Societeten i Lund Årsbok 1958–1959*, pp. 5–20. Lund: C. W. K Gleerup, 1960.

Eldevik, Randi. "Less than Kind: Giants in Germanic Tradition." In *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, edited by Tom Shippey, pp. 83–110. Tempe and Turnhout: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Brepols, 2005.

Eliade, Mircea. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Bollingen Series 46. New York: Pantheon Books, 1954.

———. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. London: Sheed and Ward, 1958.

Faulkes, Anthony. "Descent from the Gods." *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978–79): 92–125.

Faulkes, Anthony. Introduction to *Codex Trajectinus: The Utrecht Manuscript of the Prose Edda*. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile 15, pp. 9–22. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1985.

———. Introduction to *Edda Islandorum. Völuspá. Hávamál. P.H. Resen's Editions of 1665*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, vol. 2, pp. 9–95. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1977.

———. Introduction to *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes. *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, vol. 1, pp. 13–186. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1980.

———. Introduction to *Edda: Háttatal*, by Snorri Sturluson. Edited by Anthony Faulkes, pp. ix–xxviii. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

———. Introduction to *Edda:* Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, by Snorri Sturluson, 2nd ed. Edited by Anthony Faulkes, pp. xi–xxxii. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005.

———. Introduction to *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, by Snorri Sturluson. Edited by Anthony Faulkes, pp. vii–lxxii and pp. 135–528. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998.

Fidjestøl, Bjarne. *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, edited by Odd Einar Haugen. Bibliotheca Arnamagnæna 41. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1999.

Finlay, Alison. "Risking One's Head: *Vafþrúðnismál* and the Mythic Power of Poetry." In *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*, edited by Daniel Anlezark, pp. 91–108. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Finnur Jónsson. *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, vols. 1 and 2. Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1920.

———. Introduction to *De Gamle Eddadigte*, edited by Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932.

Foote, Peter. "Observations on 'Syncretism' in Early Icelandic Christianity." In *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*, edited by Michael Barnes, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, pp. 84–100. Odense: Odense University Press, 1984.

Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1981.

———. *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1990.

Geír T. Zoëga. *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

Gering, Hugo. *Die Lieder der Edda*, vol. 3: *Kommentar*, edited by B. Sijmons. Germanistische Handbibliothek 7.3. Halle: Buchandlung des Waisenhauses, 1927.

Gísli Sigurðsson. *Gaelic Influence in Iceland: Historical and Literary Contacts*. 2nd ed. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2000.

Gísli Sigurðsson. Introduction to *Eddukvæði*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1998.

Gunnar Harðarson. *Littérature et spiritualité en Scandinavie médiévale: la traduction norroise du* De arrha animae *de Hugues de Saint-Victor: étude historique et édition critique*. Bibliotheca Victorina 5. Paris: Brepols, 1995

Gunnell, Terry. "Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, pp. 92–113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

———. "Spássíukrot? Mælendamerkingar í handritum eddukvæða og miðaldaleikrita." In *Skáldskaparmál* 3, edited by Gísli Sigurðsson, Gunnar Harðarson, and Örnólfur Thorsson, 7–29. Reykjavík: Stafaholt, 1994.

———. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995.

Güntert, Hermann. *Von der Sprache der Götter und Geister: Bedeutungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur homerischen und eddischen Göttersprache*. Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1921.

Gurevich, Aron. *Categories of Medieval Culture*, translated by G. L. Campbell. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

———. "On Heroes, Things, Gods and Laughter in Germanic Poetry." In *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, edited by Jana Howlett, pp. 122–76. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. "Space and Time in the *Weltmodell* of the Old Scandinavian Peoples." *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 2 (1969): 42–53.

———. "*Þulur* in *Skáldskaparmál*: An Attempt at Skaldic Lexicology." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 107 (1992): 35–52.

Hall, Alaric. "Changing Style and Changing Meaning: Icelandic Historiography and the Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*." *Scandinavian Studies* 77.1 (2005): 1–30.

———. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007.

Halldór Hermannsson. *Bibliography of the Eddas*. *Islandica* 13. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 1920.

Harris, Joseph. "Traditions of Eddic Scholarship." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, pp. 33–57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Hastrup, Kirsten. *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*. Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1985.

———. "Presenting the Past: Reflections on Myth and History." *Folk* 29 (1987): 257–69.

Heimir Pálsson. Introduction to *Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to*. Edited by Heimir Pálsson and translated by Anthony Faulkes, pp. xi–cxxvi. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012.

———. Introduction to *Uppsala-Edda: Handritið DG 11 4to*. Edited by Heimir Pálsson, pp. 15–147. Reykjavík and Reykholt: Bókaútgáfan opna and Snorrastofa í Reykholti, 2013.

———. *Hávamál: Í ljósi íslenskrar menningar*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1999.

Heusler, Andreas. *Die Lieder der Lückeim Codex Regius der Edda*. Strassbourg: Karl J. Trübner, 1902.

Hultgård, Anders. "The Wisdom Contest in *Vafþrúðnismál*." In *Analecta Septentrionalia*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 65, edited by Wilhelm Heizmann, Klaus Böldl, and Heinrich Beck, pp. 531–39. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2009.

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir. *Frigg og Freyja: Kvenleg goðmögn í heiðnum sið*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag and Reykjavíkur Akademían, 2007.

Jansson, Sven B. F. *The Runes of Sweden*. Translated by Peter G. Foote. London: Phoenix House, 1962.

Johansson, Karl G. "*Vǫluspá*, the *Tiburtine Sybil*, and the Apocalypse in the North." In *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to* Vǫluspá *and Nordic Days of Judgement*, edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, pp. 161–84. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

Jón Helgason. *Norrøn Litteraturhistorie*. Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1934.

Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson. "Hræsvelgr, the Wind-Giant, Reinterpreted." Translated by Terry Gunnell. In *A Piece of Horse Liver: Myth, Ritual and Folklore in Old Icelandic Sources*, pp. 13–34. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1998.

Jón Karl Helgason. "Himinn úr hausi: Fáein heilabrot um heimsmynd Vafþrúðnismála." In *Skáldskaparmál* 4, edited by Gísli Sigurðsson, Gunnar Harðarson, and Örnólfur Thorsson, pp. 69–73. Reykjavík: Stafaholt, 1997.

———. "Omkring Snorres poetikk. Skaldskapens rolle í *Vafþrúðnismál* og *Snorra Edda*." In *Snorres Edda i europeisk og islandsk kultur*, edited by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, pp. 107–30. Reykholt: Snorrastofa, 2009.

Jónas Kristjánsson. *Handrita-spegill*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1993.

———. *Icelandic Manuscripts: Sagas, History and Art*. Translated by Jeffrey Cosser. Reykjavík: The Icelandic Literary Society, 1993.

———. *Sögueþjóðin*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2012.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. Introduction to *Eddukvæði: Goðakvæði* and *Hetjukvæði*. Edited by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2014.

Jørgensen, Jon Gunnar. "*Ynglinga saga* mellom fornaldersaga og kongesaga." In *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, edited by Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen, 49–59. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2009.

Kålund, Kristian. *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2 vols. Udgivet af Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske legat. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1889–94.

———. *Katalog over de oldnorsk-islandske håndskrifter i Det store kongelige bibliotek og i Universitetsbiblioteket (udenfor den Arnamagnæanske samling)*

samt den Arnamagnæanske samlings tilvækst 1894–99. Udgivet af Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske legat. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1900.

Klingenberg, Heinz. "Alvíssmál. Das Lied vom überweisen Zwerg." *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 48 (1967): 113–42.

Kopár, Lilla. *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture*. Studies in the Early Middle Ages 25. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.

Kragerud, Alv. "De mytologiske spørsmål i Fåvnesmål." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 96 (1981): 9–48.

Kristján Árnason. *The Rhythms of Dróttkvætt and other Old Icelandic Metres*. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Institute of Linguistics, 1991.

Läffler, L. Fr. "Om några underarter av Ljóðaháttr." *Studier i nordisk filologi* 4 (1913): 1–124.

Langeslag, Paul. *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015.

Larrington, Carolyne. "*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*: Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography." In *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, edited by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, pp. 59–77. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Lassen, Annette. Introduction to *Hrafnagaldur Óðins (Forspjallsljóð)*, edited and translated by Annette Lassen, pp. 7–81. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011.

———. *Odin på kristent pergament: En teksthistorisk studie*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag and Københavns Universitet, 2011.

———. "*Origines Gentium* and the Learned Origin of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*." In *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, edited by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, pp. 33–58. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012.

———. "Saxo og Snorri som mytografer: Hedenskaben i *Gesta Danorum* og *Heimskringla*." In *Saxo og Snorre*, edited by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, Karsten Friis-Jensen, and Else Mundal, pp. 209–30. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2010.

———. "The Early Scholarly Reception of *Vǫluspá* From Snorri Sturluson to Árni Magnússon." In *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, pp. 3–22. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

———. "The God on the Tree." In *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum*, edited by Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Árni Sigurjónsson, Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, Guðrún Nordal, and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, pp. 231–46. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2009.

———. *Øjet og blindheden i norrøn litteratur og mytologi*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2003.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. New York: Schocken, 1978.

Lindblad, Gustaf. "Centrala eddaproblem i 1970-talets forskningsläge." *Scripta Islandica* 28 (1977): 3–26.

———. "Poetiska Eddans förhistoria och skrivskicket i Codex regius." *Arkiv för nordisk filologie* 95 (1980): 142–67.

———. *Studier i Codex Regius av äldre Eddan* I–III. Lundastudier i nordisk språkvetenskap 10. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954.

Lindow, John. "Eddic Poetry and Mythology." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, pp. 114–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

———. *Murder and Vengeance Among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology*. FF Communications 262. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia and Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1997.

———. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

———. "Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods: Understanding *Alvíssmál*." In *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, edited by Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, pp. 285–303. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007.

———. "When Skaði Chose Njǫrðr." In *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, edited by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin, pp. 165–81. Islandica 54. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2008.

Lindqvist, Sune. *Gotlands Bildsteine*. 2 vols. Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand, 1941–42.

Machan, Tim William. "Alliteration and the Editing of Eddic Poetry." *Scandinavian Studies* 64.2 (1992): 216–27.

———. Introduction to *Vafþrúðnismál*. Edited by Tim William Machan, 2nd ed. Durham and Toronto: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (i.e. Medieval and Renaissance Studies) at Durham University and the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 2008. First published in 1988 by Durham Medieval Texts.

Magoun Jr., F. P. "Nikulás Bergsson of Munkaþverá, and Germanic Heroic Legend." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42.2 (1943): 210–18.

Malm, Mats. "I marginalen eddahandskrifterna." In *Den norröna renässansen*, edited by Karl G. Johansson, pp. 135–55. Reykholt: Snorrastofa, 2007.

Martin, John Stanley. *Ragnarǫk: An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods*. Melbourne Monographs in Germanic Studies 3. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972.

McKinnell, John. *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Northern Heathenism*. Rome: Il Calamo, 1994.

———. *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005.
———. "The Evolution of *Hávamál*." In *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, edited by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer, pp. 59–95. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
———. "The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*." In *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, edited by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer, pp. 153–71. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
———. "The Sigmundr / Sigurðr Story in an Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norse Context." In *Medieval Nordic Literature in its European Context*, edited by Else Mundal, pp. 50–77. Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2015.
———. "*Vǫluspá* and the Feast of Easter." In *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, edited by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer, pp. 3–33. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
———. "Ynglingatal—A Minimalist Interpretation." *Scripta Islandica* 60 (2009): 23–48.
McKinnell, John, Rudolf Simek, and Klaus Düwel. *Runes, Magic, and Religion: A Sourcebook*. Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia 10. Wien: Fassbaender, 2004.
Moberg, Lennart. "The Languages of *Alvíssmál*." *Saga-Book* 18 (1973): 299–323.
Motz, Lotte. "Giants in Folklore and Mythology." *Folklore* 93.1 (1982): 70–84.
Mundal, Else. "Androgyny as an Image of Chaos in Old Norse Mythology." *Maal og Minne* (1998, 1): 1–9.
———. "Forholdet mellom gudar og jotnar I norrøn mytologi i lys av det mytologiske namnematerialet." *Studia anthroponymica Scandinavica* 8 (1990): 5–18.
———. "Oral or Scribal Variation in *Vǫluspá*. A Case Study in Old Norse Poetry." In *Fjǫld veit hon fræða: Utvalde arbeid av Else Mundal*, edited by Odd Einar Haugen, Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen, and Jonas Wellendorf, pp. 359–81. Bibliotecha Nordica 4. Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2012.
———. "*Ynglinga saga* og genreproblematikken." In *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, edited by Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen, pp. 61–65. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2009.
Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 3rd ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2009.
Olsen, Magnus. *Edda- og skaldekvad: Forarbeider til kommentar*, vol. 7, *Gudedikte*. Avhandlinger utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo 2. Hist.-Filos. Klasse, N. S. 5. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964.
Olsen, Magnus. "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus." *Maal og Minne* (1909): 17–36.
Orchard, Andy. *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. London: Cassell, 1997.
———. Introduction to *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*. Translated by Andy Orchard, pp. xi–xliv and pp. 264–341. London: Penguin, 2011.
Ólafía Einarsdóttir. *Studier i kronologisk metode tidlig islandsk historieskrivning*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1964.

Quinn, Judy. "Vǫluspá and the Composition of Eddic Verse." In *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Preprints of The Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4–10 September 1988*, edited by Teresa Pàroli, pp. 325–36. Spoleto: Centro Italiano de Studi sull' Alto Medioevo, 1988.

Ricoeur, Paul. "Narrative Time." *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 169–90.

Ruggerini, Maria Elena. "A Stylistic and Typological Approach to *Vafþrúðnismál*." Appendix to John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Northern Heathenism*, pp. 139–87. Rome: Il Calamo, 1994.

Salberger, Evert. "Heill þú farir! Ett textproblem Vafþrúðnismál 4." *Scripta Islandica* 25 (1974): 23–30.

Sävborg, Daniel. "Om eddadikternas ursprung och ålder: Gamla och nya tankar." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 119 (2004): 55–104.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. "Eddic Poetry and Pre-Christian Scandinavia." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*. Edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, pp. 132–46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

———. "Livsdrik og vidensdrik: Et problemkompleks i nordisk mytologi." *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 2 (1983): 85–102.

———. "Völuspá—cyclisk tidsopfattelse i gammelnordisk religion." *danske studier* (1981): 91–95.

Schulz, Katja. *Riesen: Von Wissenshütern und Wildnisbewohnern in Edda und Saga*. Skandinavistische Arbeiten 20. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004.

See, Klaus von, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Ilona Priebe, and Katja Schulz. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vol. 2: *Götterlieder (Skírnismál, Hárbarðslióð, Hymiskviða, Þrymskviða)*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997.

See, Klaus von, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, and Katja Schulz. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vol. 3: *Götterlieder (Vǫlundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndlolióð, Grottasǫngr)*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000.

Sigurður Nordal. "Three Essays on *Völuspá*." Translated by B. S. Benedikz and J. S. McKinnell. *Saga-Book* 18 (1970–71): 79–135.

Simek, Rudolf. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. Translated by Angela Hall. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993.

Simpson, Jacqueline. "Mímir: Two Myths or One?" *Saga-Book* 16 (1962–65): 41–53.

Spiegel, Gabrielle. "Structures of Time in Medieval Historiography." *The Medieval History Journal* 19.1 (2016): 21–33.

Sprenger, Ulrike. "Vafþrúðnismál 10,3: Der Kaltgerippte." In *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik. 6: Arbeitstagung der Skandinavisten des deutschen Sprachgebietes. 26.9.–1.10.1983 in Bonn*, edited by Heinrich Beck, pp. 185–210. Texte

und Untersuchungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik 11. Frankfurt and New York: Lang, 1985.

Stahl, Pierre-Brice. "L'énigme d'inversion dans la littérature médiévale scandinave." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 229.3 (2016): 329–42.

Stephens, Walter. *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Sturtevant, Albert Morey. "Semantic and Etymological Notes on Old Norse Poetic Words." *Scandinavian Studies* 20 (1948): 129–42.

Suzuki, Seiichi. *The Meters of Old Norse Eddic Poetry: Common Germanic Inheritance and North Germanic Innovation*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 86. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson. *Lexicon Poeticum: Antique Linguæ Septrionalis. Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*. Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers, 1913–16.

———. *Lexicon Poeticum: Antique Linguæ Septrionalis. Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*. 2nd ed. Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers, 1931.

Sverdlov, Ilya V. "*Ok dulða ek þann inn alsvinna jǫtun*: Some Linguistic and Metrical Aspects of Óðinn's Win over Vafþrúðnir." *Saga-Book* 35 (2011): 39–72.

Sverrir Jakobsson. "Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View." *Saga-Book* 31 (2007): 22–38.

Thorvaldsen, Bernt Ø. "The Dating of Eddic Poetry." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, pp. 72–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Tolley, Clive. *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*. 2 vols. FF Communications 144. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia and Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2009.

———. "The Mill in Norse and Finnish Mythology." *Saga-Book* 24 (1994–97): 63–82.

Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1964.

Vésteinn Ólason. Introduction to *Konungsbók eddukvæða = Codex Regius: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gl.Kgl.Sml 2365 4to*. Translated by Robert Cook, pp. xiii–lxxviii. Reykjavík: Lögberg and Edda, 2001.

———. Introduction to *Snorri Sturluson, Ritsafn*, vol. 1: *Snorra-Edda* and *Egils saga*. Edited by Helgi Bernódusson, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Örnólfur Thorsson, pp. xi–lxxvi. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2002.

———. "Old Icelandic Poetry." In *A History of Icelandic Literature*, edited by Daisy Neijmann, pp. 1–64. Histories of Scandinavian Literature 5. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 2006.

———. "*Vǫluspá* and Time." In *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to* Vǫluspá *and Nordic Days of Judgement*, edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, pp. 25–44. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

Vries, Jan de. *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2 vols. Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 15–16. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1941–42.

———. *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 15–16. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964–67.

———. "Om Eddaens Visdomsdigtning." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 50 (1934): 1–59.

———. *The Problem of Loki*. FF Communications 110. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia and Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1933.

Wanner, Kevin J. *Snorri Sturluson and the* Edda: *The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

Watkins, Calvert. "Language of Gods and Language of Men." In *Myth and Law Among the Indo-Europeans*, edited by Jaan Puhvel, pp. 1–17. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

Webster, Helen L. "Bugge and Bréal on the Latin Element in Teutonic Mythology and Speech." *The Classical Review* 4.10 (1890): 445–47.

Wessén, Elias. Introduction to *Fragments of the Elder and the Younger Edda: AM 748 I and II 4:0*, Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Aevi 17, pp. 11–23. Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1945.

Whaley, Diana. Introduction to *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. Edited by Diana Whaley. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1, pp. cxlvii–ccxv. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012.

Williams, David. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.

Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir. "*Sigurdrífumál* og eyðan í *Konungsbók eddukvæða*." *Gripla* 18 (2012): 287–318.

Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Introduction to *Bergbúa þáttr.* In *Harðar saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 13. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991.

"This page intentionally left blank"

Index

Acker, Paul, 174
Adam of Bremen, 81n12
Álfröðull, 151–52
Alvíss, 9, 15–16, 143n20, 171–85, 188–89
Alvíssmál, 7, 9, 14, 15–16, 37, 40, 46, 74, 75, 143n20, 157, 164, 171–85, 188–89, 195
androgyny, 128–30
Aristotle, 26
Ármann Jakobsson, 13, 21n27, 144n41, 146n57, 165, 183, 185
Ásgarðr, 6, 8, 53–80, 95, 98, 137, 147, 164, 172, 177, 189, 190, 192
Atlakviða, 20n13, 21n23
Atlamál, 20n13
Atli Buðlason, 11, 20n22
Attila the Hun *see* Atli Buðlason
Aurgelmir, 76–77, 88, 112, 114–17, 123–32, 150

Bagge, Sverre, 17
Baldr, 7, 9, 38, 42, 64–67, 87, 147, 154, 157, 161–63, 165, 190, 193
Baldrs draumar, 21n26, 37, 88, 154–56
Barthes, Roland, 19n10
Beowulf, 11
Bergbúa þáttr, 127–28
Bergelmir, 76–77, 88, 124–25, 130–32
Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir, 50n17
Boer, R.C., 92, 153, 167n10
Borst, Arno, 34
Bugge, Sophus, 13, 37–38, 92
Bragi, 16, 174
Brynjólfur Sveinsson (bishop), 36

Campbell, Joseph, 138
Christianity, 8, 32, 187–88, 194
Ciklamini, Marlene, 144n36
Clunies Ross, Margaret, 19n4, 41–44, 46, 48, 55, 142n10, 145n46, 172, 175, 178, 183
Codex Regius, 19n4, 20n13, 173, 184
Copenhagen, 36

Dagr, 99, 120, 121
death, 53, 66–67, 77, 107, 139–40, 148, 160, 164, 174, 180, 182–85, 188–89
deceit, 89
Dellingr, 99, 120
Denmark, 17
Dieterle, Richard, L., 67
Doomsday, 33–34, 194
dwarves, 16, 43, 120, 171–85

eddic poetry, 1, 9, 10, 12–14, 19n1, 21n23, 21n26, 21n27, 33–49, 51n60, 177, 194
Eddica Minora, 21n26
Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 40, 88
Einar Pálsson, 138
einherjar, 6, 7, 136–39, 149, 158
Ejder, Bertil, 92

Eldevik, Randi, 126
Eliade, Mircea, 27, 33–35, 42, 44, 111–12, 121, 166, 172, 190, 193, 194
Élivágar, 126–28
elves, 173, 180
England, 11, 20n16, 38, 40
English (language), 38
Ermanaric *see* Jörmunrekr
eschatology, 17, 32, 34, 158, 180, 188
ethos, 2, 185
euhemerism, 18, 57–58, 98
exegesis, 166

fate, 7, 15, 29, 65–67, 70, 77, 87, 139–40, 158–61, 165
Faulkes, Anthony, 16, 74, 173
Fáfnir, 15
Fáfnismál, 11, 14, 15, 21n23, 42, 168n15
Fenrir, 7, 64, 73, 78, 138, 150–51, 156, 158–59, 165, 190, 195
Fensalir, 8, 64, 71
Fidjestøl, Bjarne, 21n25, 37, 41
Finlay, Alison, 85
Finnur Jónsson, 38–39, 46, 92–94, 120, 125
Fjölsvinnsmál, 21n26, 37, 40, 89, 120, 175
Freyja, 67, 136, 176
Freyr, 57–58, 75, 136
Frigg, 6, 8, 45, 64–73, 78, 84n42, 119, 189, 192
Frye, Northrop, 45, 50n16, 50n26, 185

Genesis, 33, 77, 99, 111, 116, 131–32
Geoffrey of Monmouth, 20n16
Gesta Danorum (Saxo Grammaticus), 12, 36, 188
Gestumblindi, 16, 154, 162–63
Gísli Sigurðsson, 21n26
Gnitaheiðr, 21n23
Gospels, 33
Grimm, Jacob, 36
Grímnismál, 5, 8, 11, 16, 18, 36, 37, 38, 40, 47, 56, 63, 67–69, 88, 114–15, 138, 164, 174, 189, 191, 192
Grípisspá, 14, 20n13, 38
Grógaldr, 21n26, 40, 73
Grottasöngr, 21n26, 75
Guðmundardrápa (Árni Jónsson), 151
Gunnarr Gjúkason, 21n23
Gunnell, Terry, 14, 46–48, 78–79, 103, 188
Gurevich, Aron, 20n22, 27, 32–33, 117, 166, 172, 190, 194
Gylfaginning, 1, 2, 8, 10–11, 16–17, 59–60, 66–67, 76–77, 79, 99, 104, 115–16, 120, 122, 126–34, 136, 137–38, 149, 150, 159, 162, 174, 192

Hárbarðsljóð, 4–5, 14–16, 37, 38, 88, 164, 177, 178, 179
Hastrup, Kirsten, 25–26
Háttatal, 1
Hávamál, 5, 11, 36, 37, 38, 40, 48, 61–63, 70, 75, 76, 93, 95, 120, 140, 160, 164, 177
heathenism *see* paganism
Heidegger, Martin, 27
Heiðrekr, 4, 16, 77, 154–55, 162–65
Heiðreks gátur, 4, 16, 45–46, 77, 120, 154–56, 162–65
Heimdallr, 190
Heimskringla, 17–18, 23n49
Hel, 157, 160
Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, 100, 182–83
Hervararkviða, 89
Hliðskjálf, 8, 189
Hlöðskviða, 21n26
Hœnir, 57–58, 136, 157
Hrafnagaldur Óðins, 37

Hrímfaxi, 98–99, 133
Hrímgerðr, 100, 182–83
Hrímgrímnir, 100
Hrímnir, 100
hrímþursar, 59–60, 76, 100, 127, 129–31
Hrungnir, 157
Hræsvelgr, 133–34
hubris, 66
Hymir, 127
Hymiskviða, 9, 37, 74, 75, 127, 129
Hyndluljóð, 11, 21n26, 37, 40, 42, 100
Höðr, 66, 157, 168n22

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, 64, 71, 72
Ireland, 38
Italy, 20n16
Ífing, 101, 127

Jesus Christ, 33–34, 62, 146n64
Jón Helgason, 40
Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 126, 134
Jónas Kristjánsson, 19n4
Jörmunrekr, 11, 20n22
jötnar, 1, 7–8, 42–43, 75, 78, 84n46, 87, 96, 100–1, 104, 107, 117, 124–32, 136–39, 165, 180, 190, 193
Jötunheimr, 54, 69, 73, 75, 89, 119, 127, 172

Kant, Immanuel, 30
Keyser, Rudolf, 37
Kvasir, 58, 136, 180

Landnámabók, 111
languages, 171–72, 176, 179, 180–81, 184
Larrington, Carolyne, 18, 81, 114–15, 122, 134, 141–42, 189
Lassen, Annette, 20n14, 36, 146n64
lausavísur (Eyvindr skáldaspillir), 151
Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 10, 187

Líf, 149–51, 156, 158, 165
Lífþrasir, 149–51, 156, 158, 165, 167n7
Lindblad, Gustaf, 19n11, 142n8
Lindow, John, 4, 10, 21n28, 43–44, 46, 48, 55, 67, 116, 128, 131, 172, 174, 177, 180, 184–85
Lokasenna, 11, 14, 17, 37, 40, 65–66, 72, 79, 177, 178
Loki, 9, 33, 38, 66–67, 72, 83n31, 155, 165, 176, 177, 178, 190

Machan, Tim, 12, 46, 76, 79, 101, 108n5, 108n19, 118, 145n48, 148, 152–53, 167n10
magic, 57–58, 61–63, 71, 73, 88, 160
Magni, 156–58
Martin, John Stanley, 158
McKinnell, John, 19n3, 20n15, 21n24, 41, 45–46, 48, 108n21, 125, 140, 163, 191
mead of poetry, 17, 180
memory, 14, 31, 49n4, 63, 130–32
microcosm, 5, 105, 107, 111, 193
Miðgarðr, 89, 98, 101, 114, 116, 126, 127
Miðgarðsormr, 190
Mímir, 57–61, 82n22, 88, 136, 150
mistletoe, 66–67, 157
Moberg, Lennart, 176, 180–81
Motz, Lotte, 144n39
Móði, 156–58
Mundal, Else, 143n26, 145n46
Mundilfœri, 118–19, 143n19, 181
myth, 3, 12, 25–26, 32, 44–46, 48, 53–55, 166–67, 175, 177, 187, 189, 194
mythography, 2, 4, 25–26
Mögþrasir, 153, 156, 165, 167n10

Nibelungenlied, 12
Nikulás Bergsson (abbot), 21n23
Njörðr, 6, 7, 57–58, 134–36

Nornagests þáttr, 79
Norns, 153, 156, 168n15
Norway, 23n49, 38–40
Nótt, 99, 120–21, 143n20
Nörfi (Nörvi, Narfi), 99, 120, 143n20

Odinic motif, 6, 26, 56–63, 75, 88, 179
Oedipus, 165
orality, 1, 8, 10, 15, 25–26, 166

paganism, 8, 10–13, 20n16, 32–34, 39, 41, 45, 96, 115–16, 146n64, 166, 174, 187, 192–94
Paulus Diaconus, 20n16, 81n12, 84n42
Poetic Edda, The, 4
poison, 126–27
Prologue (*Snorra Edda*), 1, 2

Ragnarök, 5–7, 9, 15, 38, 45, 60–61, 64–67, 73, 77, 78, 80, 87, 101, 104, 111, 113, 117, 136–40, 147, 149–53, 156–60, 165, 180, 190, 195
Rask, Rasmus, 36
reception, 32, 35
Resen, Peder Hansen, 36
rhetoric, 50n16, 104–05
Ricoeur, Paul, 27–32, 42–43, 44–45, 49, 50n17, 53, 89, 107, 123, 166, 172, 173, 188, 194–95
Rígsþula, 21n26, 37, 40
Rindr, 157
Ruggerini, Maria Elena, 55–56, 70, 90–91, 104, 139, 155–56, 191
runes, 33, 61–62, 78, 160

Saxo Grammaticus, 12, 17, 20n16, 36, 84n42, 188
Schjødt, Jens Peter, 27, 41, 113
Sigrdrífumál, 82n22
Sigurðarkviða in skamma, 20n13
Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, 15, 25, 168n15
Sigurður Nordal, 85–87, 102, 126
Simek, Rudolf, 74, 125, 150, 167n10
Skaði, 136
skaldic poetry, 2, 10, 11, 19n1, 21n27, 39, 50n60, 84n43, 108n21
Skáldskaparmál, 1, 10, 16–17, 62, 127, 157, 173–75, 192
Skinfaxi, 97, 99, 133
Skírnismál, 14, 37, 55, 74, 75, 89, 100, 151
Sólarljóð, 37
Snorra Edda, 1, 4, 10–11, 17–18, 19n1, 19n3, 21n26, 21n27, 23n50, 36, 40, 43, 45, 75, 92, 116, 173, 174, 188, 192
Snorri Sturluson, 1, 10, 17–18, 19n1, 21n27, 72, 131–32, 134, 159, 162, 184
Surtr, 6, 103
Svásuðr, 122
Sverdlov, Ilya V., 71
Sverrir (king), 17
Svipdagsmál, 21n26

Tacitus, 21n27, 81n12
time, 26–33, 35, 41–44, 87, 97–99, 104, 117–23, 151, 165–66, 172, 181, 190–91
Tolley, Clive, 118–19, 131–32
trolls, 68
Turville-Petre, Gabriel, 132, 160
Týr, 127

valkyries, 92
Vanaheimr, 135–36
vanir, 6–7, 42, 43, 57–58, 134–36, 180
Valhöll, 6, 64, 66, 137–138, 157
Váli, 64, 156, 157, 168n22
Vegtamr, 154–55

Vegtamskviða see Baldrs draumar
Vésteinn Ólason, 9, 19n11, 20n18
Vindsvalr, 122
Víðarr, 156–57, 159, 168n22, 190
Vígríðr, 103–4, 109n33
Vries, Jan de, 39–40, 46, 55
Völsung legend, 11
Völsunga saga, 20n13, 21n23
Völundarkviða, 37, 50n22, 74, 173, 185
Völuspá, 5, 9, 11, 15, 21n26, 22n40, 26, 37, 40, 42, 45, 46, 48, 59–61, 64–65, 74, 86, 87, 99, 104, 116, 123, 126, 135, 140, 150, 152–53, 156–57, 159, 180, 184, 190, 192
Völuspá in skamma, 40

Wanner, Kevin, 10, 19n1
Watkins, Calvert, 181–82

Yggdrasill, 38, 59–60, 61, 140, 150
Ymir *see* Aurgelmir
Ynglinga saga, 17–18, 23n49, 57–58, 71–72, 136
Ynglingatal (Þjóðólfr ór Hvini), 17–18

Þingeyrar (monastery), 22n36, 51
Þórr, 4, 5, 9, 15–16, 25, 33, 74, 75, 88, 127, 156–58, 164, 168n18, 171–85, 190, 195
Þórsdrápa (Eilífr Goðrúnarson), 9
Þrúðgelmir, 88, 124–25, 130
Þrúðr, 157, 178, 183
Þrymskviða, 9, 37, 40, 55, 67, 74, 75, 157, 175–76, 178, 185
þulur, 40, 73–74, 78, 84n43, 92–93, 100, 151, 157, 173

Ægir, 16–17, 79, 175, 178
æsir, 1, 8, 16, 18, 23n49, 25, 42, 43, 56–58, 75, 78, 80, 87, 89, 96, 98, 100–101, 104, 107, 117, 124, 126–28, 135–39, 157, 165, 180, 182, 188–90, 193

"This page intentionally left blank"